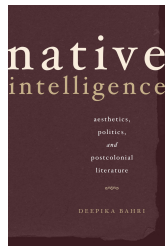
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DEEPIKA BAHRI

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Aesthetics, Politics, and Postcolonial Literature

Deepika Bahri

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The End of Literature

> The third-world novel will not offer the satisfactions of Proust or Joyce.
>
> —Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism"

> One paints a painting, not what it represents.
>
> —Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*

The Text in the World

This book is about the crisis of postcolonial literature, manifested in anxiety over its relevance, uncertainty about its value, and suspicions of the death of literature as a significant social form. At a stage in the development of capital when all that is solid seems predictably to be melting into air on a worldwide scale, and artistic expression is increasingly regulated by technological expansion and market considerations, the value of the aesthetic sphere as a distinctive activity threatens to dissolve pari passu. Although various and often mutually contradictory impulses characterize postcolonial theory and criticism, making the term *post-colonial* notoriously indefinable and definitive claims virtually impossible, it is nevertheless clear that a direct engagement with this crisis has yet to take shape. What is attempted in these pages is a response to the remarkable lack of a sufficiently developed critical framework for addressing "the aesthetic dimension" (in Herbert Marcuse's words) of post-colonial literature. Most

materialist currents of thought in the past two centuries grant the aesthetic a central position, prompting a long overdue inquiry into its significance for the interpretation of postcolonial cultural products and to the relationship of aesthetics to political and moral issues.[1]

Neither the aggregate concept of "postcolonial literature" nor the concept of the "aesthetic dimension" of literature and other art forms, however, should be considered self-explanatory. A set of cultural products, which Timothy Brennan describes as "either made here, or for here, or reminiscent of what already exists here, or (more important) of immediate and practical use here," have come to function as "synecdoches of the whole" and exemplary of the postcolonial (*At Home in the World* 27). The novels studied in this book might arguably be described as belonging to this category. *Native Intelligence* explores the place of aesthetics in postcolonial literary representation by engaging closely with works by Rohinton Mistry, Salman Rushdie, and Arundhati Roy, such as *Such a Long Journey* (1991), *Grimus* (1975), *Midnight's Children* (1981), *Shame* (1983), *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), and *The God of Small Things* (1997), works that meet metropolitan standards, including awards, critical attention, and sales. These authors represent a select hegemonic strand within the field, with works ranging from 1975 to 1997, loosely typifying a genre Brennan describes as cosmopolitan writing with a largely metropolitan context of reception (38).

The choice of these texts should suggest neither that literature is the only form worth analyzing under the current stage of capital, nor that these texts are more worthy of a dialectical materialist aesthetic exploration than others, nor indeed that these anglophone novels should be considered representative of the formal, ideological, or linguistic plenitude of postcolonial cultural expression. More demotic forms such as world music and Afro or Indie pop may well provide even more fertile ground for exploring the "glocal" ramifications of the global culture industry not only as illustrations of cultural convergence but also as counternarratives to the cultural logic of late capitalism. Brennan's *At Home in the World* (1997) and Neil Lazarus's *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World* (1999) discuss these forms alongside more "traditional" literary and theoretical productions, with the goal of resuscitating critical interest in anticolonial nationalism and

anticapitalist narratives of liberation. In the face of this exciting new work on a variety of postcolonial cultural practices, a conservative "return" to analyzing "elite" texts by suspiciously paradigmatic postcolonial authors therefore warrants some explanation.

Although the field has been morphing as a result of revisionary scholarship, it remains true that we are more likely to seek the general features of a composite profile for postcolonial literature in the globally framed fiction of a Rushdie than in the more class-based realism of a Munshi Premchand, or in more populists forms of expression. Notwithstanding the need to address the politics of exclusion and the provinciality of ersatz cosmopolitanism, however, a defeatist surrender of the putatively elite text to the politics of metropolitan reception must likewise be resisted. Brennan's early work on Rushdie, at once intensely critical and laudatory, demonstrated the need for this sort of interpretive stance toward the successful postcolonial text. The importance of such a stance has hardly abated as newer texts join the sanctioned "counter-canon" and older ones become "standard." To the extent that the sort of highly successful cosmopolitan text discussed in this book is often mediated by the very process of flattening that ushers it into the mainstream of acceptable radicalism, its expansively geocultural inflections are apt to be muted, its resistive potential muffled, and its aesthetic dimension lost to its parochially functional purpose. If this text has attained "the greatest leverage and visibility now," as Brennan correctly notes, it is also a product likely to retain its privileged status within the educational apparatus (27).

It is no less important to refuse to cede this text either to reactionary, nonmaterialist, apolitical aesthetics, or to an ineffectually diluted metropolitan political correctness, or indeed to an unimaginatively constrained conception of political value. This struggle cannot be prematurely abandoned, even as the categories of the "postcolonial" as well as the "aesthetic" continue to be reimagined through alternative texts and perspectives. A further challenge posed by Brennan in *At Home in the World* is that the "novelty" of the tropes of "political fantasy" and "migrancy" first introduced by writers like Rushdie seems to have suffered accelerated decay in "inspired echoes" in "the newspaper review and the undergraduate lecture without adding anything

fundamentally new to the original concepts," rendering what was "monumental" once now "democratic" (47). The trope of novelty, however, needs no less to be investigated and reimagined than the context of the reception of the postcolonial text. Theodor Adorno suggests that

> While it may be precisely the "attraction of the new" that becomes outmoded in works of art, those which lack such charms, which do not break through the routinized consciousness of their age through that charm—a consciousness to which the questionable confidence in the judgment of posterity also belongs—will scarcely live to grow old. (*Notes to Literature,* I, 140).

Criticism must continue to struggle to release substantive forms of novelty in the postcolonial text by reanimating the relation of form and content and that of aesthetics and politics in order to assess *how* this literature is news, as Ezra Pound claims, that *stays* news.

The concept of the "aesthetic dimension" also warrants annotation. Although Marcuse's development in an eponymous late project (1978) of the idea earlier referred to in *Eros and Civilization* (1955) as well as in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972) foregrounds "aesthetic form," the notion of form is no less abstruse, encompassing not only style and technique but a mutually transformative relationship with content. Contrary both to aestheticism, which assumes the self-sufficiency and insularity of art, and to the orthodoxy of traditional Marxist aesthetics, which interprets "the quality and truth of a work of art in terms of the totality of the prevailing relations of production," Marcuse's concept places art in a dialectical relation with historical conditions, allowing us to pose the following questions (*Aesthetic*

Dimension ix): How do aesthetic considerations contest and moderate the social function of postcolonial texts? In light of the emphasis placed on sociohistorical developments by theorists associated with the Frankfurt School, what are the particular challenges posed by supposedly "high" cultural products as aesthetics begins to reappear in theoretical discussions at an unprecedented juncture in the development of global capital? What form of "value" or "truth-content" (*Wahrheitsgehalt* for Adorno) might we seek in the text so flamboyantly given over to commodification? Finally, is it possible to bring aesthetics and politics onto the same page without capitulating either to a facile rapprochement or a relentlessly divisive schism between the two? In other words, what are the implications of conceiving the aesthetic as political and moral without surrendering it to a transparent and reductive purpose?

In response to these questions, this book assumes two charges. First, it identifies the burden of representation borne by a certain sort of post-colonial literature through its casting as native informancy and its reception as ethnographic and ideologically saturated text. Submerging its resistive potential, the global culture industry and its articulation with the educational apparatus threaten to transform this potential into what Drew Milne calls "a currency of information to be rendered into capital" (6). In functional "multiculti" pedagogic contexts that strive for "graspable" difference, as Brennan puts it, a preponderance of interest in issues Aijaz Ahmad described as "authorized" postcolonial questions in *In Theory* often accompanies a disinterest in aesthetic mimesis as irreducible to information. At the same time, in critiques sensitive to the "worldliness" of the overcirculated postcolonial text, a defensible interest in literary success as an index of social privilege nevertheless further vitiates the import of literature as a mode of aesthetic praxis. The book's success is assumed a priori to hobble its capacity for meaningfully challenging the status quo that evidently favors it. A crucial corollary to the conception of the text in the world, however, is that of the world *in* the text, this relationship conjugated in a mode Theodor Adorno describes in his late work, *Aesthetic Theory,* as "a materialistic-dialectical aesthetics" (3).[2]

At a historical juncture when the Frankfurt School's pronouncements about the end of autonomous art seem truer than

ever before, the question of the value of aesthetic expression is particularly fraught.[3] To rephrase slightly Jameson's proposition in *Late Marxism,* the problem to which this book struggles to respond is that of how the suspiciously successful, commercialized, and often ideologically conservative work can nevertheless have value and truth-content, a problem that "is still very much with us" (231). How does one broach the potential truth-content of the work that has not only *not* "renounced consumption,"— Adorno's shibboleth for artistic autonomy—but has been aggressively marketed for it? ("On the Fetish Character" 31). Because of its commitment to a simultaneous consideration of the historic and aesthetic dimensions of art, Frankfurt School Critical Theory provides the framework for this project, allowing me to address the twin desiderata of aesthetic and political accounting so integral to postcolonial criticism. Although the conceptual formulations of Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Herbert Marcuse supply the scaffolding for the readings in *Native Intelligence,* this study nevertheless departs from the usual characterization of the end of art in Frankfurt School Critical Theory. Instead, it argues that attention to the aesthetic innovations, plural origins, and "formal" commitments of postcolonial works uncovers their complex and uneven relationship to ideology, revivifying their potential to make novel contributions to the larger project of social liberation, a potential that issues from the very historical conditions that inevitably also limit and define it. Central to this argument are a rereading of the relationship of theory and praxis in Critical Theory and a recasting of the utopian project in terms of a prior question: What constitutes meaningful political activity, and how do certain works of literature oblige us to ponder the relationship between theory and practice? In assuming the centrality of these issues, I take my cue from Adorno himself in his final, unfinished project, *Aesthetic Theory,* which, as Michael Sullivan and John T. Lysaker have so insightfully argued, suggests that the artwork's capacity to maintain the "tension between subject and object" may be the very key to emancipatory theory and practice (Sullivan and Lysaker 108).

Such a stance obviously does not imply literature's insularity at all; rather, it conceives of art's aesthetic norms as historically determined, of its status as commodity as a crucial component of

its composition, of its truth content as a "formal" virtue rooted in its poetic engagement with material realities, and of its contributions in textual aspects not readily assimilated to established trends of thought. Its inherent difference from propositional representation and sensuous apprehension of the world from which it is developed are foundational to its attempts, even if failed, to take flight from what Jameson so poetically describes as "the mud of the present age in which the winged Utopian shoes stick, imagining that to be the force of gravity itself" (*The Seeds of Time* 75). Literature's truth-content is unlikely to be released without a commitment to an interpretative stance that approaches it as an artifact at once sociopolitical and aesthetic, in fact as always simultaneously so, with each element inextricably bound up with the other. The second and considerably more challenging charge of this book, therefore, is a reanimation of the aesthetic dimension as a crucial category in the assessment of the social content of postcolonial literature. This book's extended argument is that a nonidentitarian understanding of the value of aesthetic expression can yield a richer prize: a more nuanced appreciation of the significance of figuration in representation and of the aesthetic as a code in the scheme of utopian thinking.

The historically unique status of postcolonial literature and its multiple generative sources, this work contends, furnish the materials for exploring its value in the age of advanced capitalism and its constitutive limits. Arguing for attention to the content and formal qualities, this study demonstrates its concurrent placement within global capitalism and in the context of its vernacular and temporally disjunctive phase, extending the conception of the "modern" beyond periodicity and the validity of critical aesthetics beyond the narrowly conceived "standard" of European modern art, which one finds, for instance, in the work of Adorno. Finally, it argues that the undervaluation of aesthetics is a measure of criticism's inadequate resistance to the status quo logic of exchange society, rather than a symptom of postcolonial literature's inability to offer "satisfaction" or relevance for the political project. Although the terms for an aesthetic analysis generated in chapter 3 may well be applicable to a range of texts —postcolonial or otherwise—this project suggests not so much a generalizable case for all postcolonial literature as an invitation to

accept the labor of interpretation in the face of two equally sterile options: the assumption either of irrelevance because of the text's success—and therefore complicity with the market—or of its inherent radicalism by virtue of category alone.

Against the dominant notion of "native intelligence" as minority and Third World informancy stands the conception of native intelligence as the aesthetic cognition of literature in its conflicted relation to the logic of what Marcuse conceives of as the world of work and power. This hermeneutic stance permits a conception of literature as simultaneously embedded in a real, reified world of commodities *and* in potential tension with it by virtue of its native regime of aesthetic and formal organization. If in the current context it thus bears what Adorno calls "the scars of capitalism," it may also contain "elements of change" that a redemptive reading must struggle to uncover when possible (quoted in Buck-Morss, *Origin of Negative Dialectics* 149). These elements are evident neither in auctorial intention nor in the work's transparent compliance with a recognizable program of deliverance. "The work of art becomes knowledge," Adorno claims, "only as a totality, only *in and through all its mediations,* not in its individual intentions" (*Notes to Literature,* I, 232; emphasis mine). The struggle to release the potential truth-content of postcolonial literature places artistic production in a dialectic with history while exploring potential "elements of change." Thoughtful criticism must struggle to liberate the energy of this dynamic by attending more carefully to the processes of aesthetic mediation alongside literature's other mediations.

This book instantiates a variety of possible readings that arise from this hermeneutic matrix, all targeted toward a recognition of the complex intelligence of these literary works, revealed in one or more of the following modes of the text's singular and miniaturized interface with the general: its textual "formality" in articulating language and structure with content; its aesthetic sensibility in treating love and death, joy and terror as experiences both social and sensuous; its "reduction," as we would understand the term in a culinary sense, of the material of life experience into a seemingly systematic whole; and finally, its stance toward the nettlesome question of utopia as a matter both political and theoretical. *Native Intelligence* thus tackles mutual links between poesis and polis—the status of elite postcolonial literature as

sociopolitical document, its conflicted placement within the logic of commodity capitalism, and its transforming mimesis of the sociopolitical and natural world that nevertheless limits and shapes its laws of movement.

If class determinations and ideological predispositions depress the desire to envision a socialist utopia, the project of human liberation is nevertheless a considerable preoccupation in the work of these writers. It may be argued that a utopia conceived either through an indictment of existing reality or as an amorphous no-place defined by impossibility leaves no room for a program for struggle, relegating the growing problems of the exploited and their recalcitrance to global capital to the unacknowledged trivia of postcolonial experience. Moreover, if the resistance of the postcolonial is confined to the acceptable textual resistance afforded by elite cosmopolitan works, even the limited goal of influencing First World structures of perception is poorly met. These problems cannot be wished away. The idea of an unimaginable utopia, or what Adorno and Marcuse would refer to, after Stendhal, as the "*promesse du bonheur,*" that cannot be easily derived or projected from the conditions of the present is tangled up with a necessary recognition of the increasingly totalizing grip of global capital. At the same time, however, "the thinking of totality itself—the urgent feeling of the presence all around us of some overarching system that we can at least name," as Jameson observes in *The Seeds of Time,* "has the palpable benefit of forcing us to conceive of at least the possibility of other alternative systems, something we can now identify as our old friend Utopian thinking" (70). The "novelty" of the texts discussed in this book is here recoded as the "longing for the new," a potent challenge to the existing order, even in texts we are wont to cast as conservative or complicit with capital in its cosmopolitan and global phase (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 32). The truth-content of art, therefore, may well lie (the double entendre be noted) in its gesture toward some other true and unknown society rather than in a pseudo-reflection of its shape from a given reality in the present or in the past. It could rest, moreover, in its questioning of the assumption that the rightful content of political action is already known and understood. The critical question raised by these observations may be posed thus: What "third" world nonaligned with conventional rationality and identity thinking is

thus suggested by these texts? And what are its challenges to and limits for the political project as currently conceived? The extraordinarily generative power of a materialistic dialectical aesthetics cues us to the inherent ambivalence of high cultural expression, without, as I hope to demonstrate, preventing us from recuperating what may be of value in it: its plea for a nonidentitarian sensibility and its reiteration of the aesthetic as a powerful mode for engaging with otherness. If anything, the undervaluation of its usefully dialectical relationship to governing sociohistorical contradictions betrays inadequate suspicion of the status quo logic of exchange society as well as a disregard for art and literature as profoundly rather than superficially social, while also sinking difference completely into totality. It is precisely in retaining the unknowability of utopia—of the "end" of political struggle—that art and literature call into question specious certainties about the "means" through which that end is to be achieved. In doing so, they keep alive the contradictions that characterize orthodoxies of deliverance, without surrendering the desire for deliverance.

It would be audacious to suggest a blueprint for a new postcolonial aesthetics from the admittedly selective texts analyzed in this study, however, given the very heterogeneity and ambiguity that render the term "postcolonial" debatable and the ideological and linguistic variety of postcolonial cultural expression that challenges the development of pat formulae or one global aesthetic. Within the particular historical conditions in which a certain sort of text gains its value as a representative object of investigation in a largely metropolitan context, however, this approach has some critical force. It is aesthetic mediation that issues a potent challenge to epistemological quests that are either totally subject-centered in the desire for sameness or entirely object-centered in pursuit of difference. By "particular historical conditions" in my remarks above I mean not only the historical context of colonialism that yields variable forms and cultural texts but also the disciplinary circumstances of postcolonial studies as a First World phenomenon with a hitherto fairly cramped sense of what constitutes the postcolonial.

The politics of colonial and neocolonial enunciation has been the subject of many a postcolonial critique, especially following Edward Said's influential *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism.*

Postcolonial studies has been characterized *ab incunabilis* by these political considerations.[4] As the ostensible response to imperial ideology, postcolonial literature enters an academic arena already shaped by the complicated politics of representation. In his chapter on Salman Rushdie's *Shame,* Aijaz Ahmad observes with trademark trenchancy that "the range of questions that may be asked of the texts which are currently in the process of being canonized . . . must predominantly refer . . . to representations of colonialism, nationhood, postcoloniality, the typology of rulers, their powers, corruptions" (*In Theory* 124). Because it is expected to be thus employed, postcolonial literature that cannot address one or more of the expected themes, overtly or otherwise, is rarely mobilized for broad conversations in First World discourse. What is widely understood as a literature intelligible to a transnational audience (disciplinary politesse translates the non–Third World thus) is thus likely to be far more successful in the "global" market that readers will recognize as another mystification for the appetite of the metropole for "intelligible" information from the ostensible periphery. Although not every critical reception will betray the recourse to stock formulae and expectations, a web of professional practices that include publishing, book reviews, syllabus exchange, conferences, and electronic exchanges creates a pattern of privileging texts more readily responsive to "authorized" questions and pedagogic imperatives.[5] By "texts" I refer not so much to specific books and authors as empirical objects but to the creation of epistemological objects in "authorized" versions of these books and authors through selective practices of reading and criticism. Not surprisingly, the postcolonial text that is amenable to a discussion of topics authorized by self-reinforcing practices is thus also susceptible to being regarded as an efficient substitute for otherwise time-consuming investigations into history, politics, economics et al.—a curricular prospect that would be good material for an administrator's nightmare.

The accession of literary postcoloniality to prominence comes a scant two decades after the term "postcolonial" was used and debated in political theory without gaining broader currency. Postcolonial literature and theory, having achieved disciplinary status, now take precedence over what once was a primarily political project. Rather than displace the latter, however, literary

postcoloniality increasingly subsumes it. The charge of historical, economic, political representation has come to rest increasingly on that portion of postcolonial experience that is available through canonical literary postcoloniality. Although all literature may be said to bear the watermark of history, the intermeshing of sociopolitics with artistic and intellectual expression is seen as a distinctive and defining attribute of what we recognize as "postcolonial." Indeed, it is an invariable expectation, as Robert Young's comments confirm:

> Whatever one might say about the troubled term "postcolonial". . . one characteristic aspect of postcolonial writing, be it creative or critical, involves its historical and political agenda, which in broad terms gives it common objectives. ("Ideologies of the Postcolonial" 5)

The particular burden of this "characteristic aspect" for postcolonial literature is that, apart from interlocking generally with questions of history, it is expected to engage with the material concerns. Unfortunately, alertness to sociopolitical relevance is often transformed into a perception of the postcolonial literary book as a primarily documentary social text, with scant regard for its aesthetic dimension. Conversely, the operation of what Brennan describes as a "geopolitical aesthetic" (*pace* Jameson) is also apt to stifle the text's localist orientation and its potential value for the political project. Despite the more thoughtful interventions of postcolonial theory, the poesis/polis nexus often reveals itself in common practice as dominated by an obsession with a somewhat vulgar mode of representation. In this scheme, the semiotic and aesthetic sign field is expected to overlap —unproblematically—with the important business of political signification; the text thus stands for something other than itself,

either through portraiture or faithful mimesis *(Darstellung)* or through a perception of its standing-in—however dubiously— for a constituency requiring representation *(Vertretung)*. The notion of literary value is therefore increasingly determined by the ratios of this exchange and by the textual capacity for sustaining this overlap, enabling a false practical commensurability and generating anxiety about representation. This often leads, in turn, to critiques that are either "'one-factor' analyses (i.e., crude Marxisms, feminisms, radicalisms, etc.) that yield a one dimensionalism or a hyper-subtle analytical perspective that loses touch with the specificity of an art work's form and the context of its reception," as Cornel West suggests in "The New Cultural Politics of Difference" (106). As it turns out, the aesthetic and semiotic field can and does overlap with political signification, but this process need not be characterized either by transparence or by equivalence.

While expectations of representation unproblematized by mediation threaten to prematurely curtail the plural significance of the literary text, its relationship to ideology also threatens to assume an unproductively transparent character. "A whole range of other questionings," Ahmad reminds us, have had to concede to the "authorized questions." In occupying himself with some of these "*other* questions," Ahmad proceeds to train his considerable critical sights on "the political affiliations of the author [Rushdie]," in an interpretation that is admittedly "a *symptomatic* reading of an ideological location" rather than "a *sufficient* reading of either the author or the book" (*In Theory* 125). Ahmad is unusual in declaring his position so clearly; most interpretations of post-colonial literature proceed with little regard for "the whole range of other kinds of questionings" beyond customary ones. His own critique, however, reveals the extent to which even resistant readings respond only partially to the full burden of a dialectical aesthetics.

When Ahmad "changes . . . the questions," the politics of metropolitan constructions of the postcolonial subject is countered through an admittedly engaging critique of an inadequate politics of struggle. Ahmad concludes his essay on Rushdie's *Shame* by pointing out that Rushdie's "stance of unbelonging" and "accompanying inability to believe in any community of actual praxis" is what is obscured "in those readings of his work which

locate it primarily in the problematic of 'Nation' and the 'Third World'" (*In Theory* 154, 158). Ahmad's impatience with the characteristic despair of bourgeois culture melds into his critique of "an art of despair" and Rushdie's failure to "include regenerative possibilities" (151). The location of these possibilities in the "impractical" structures of feeling and sensuous experience are disregarded both because of inattention to the text's aesthetic and formal features and because of foundational assumptions about the program for a meaningful struggle. The ideological construction of the author and the text receive necessary and full attention in this reading, but a treatment of the possible cognitive content and aesthetic value of the text are postponed for a more propitious season. The interception of the aesthetic object by its representational power effectively forestalls inquiry into literature as an artistic object that may exceed the author's intention and sometimes his/her ideological predisposition, on the one hand. On the other, a sharpened awareness of the operation of ideology productively alerts us to literary collusion, but it can also blind us to its propensity for colliding with it. The phenomenon of uninflected and preemptive politicization may well be true for literature in general in current practices, but it is almost invariably true for postcolonial literature. The disappearance of a shared sense of literary value, as Frank Lentricchia memorably bemoaned in his *Lingua Franca* disclosure, has invariably bolstered this tendency in practical postcolonial criticism.[6] The care of the aesthetic in readings of postcolonial literature has for too long been the love that dare not speak its name.

As postcolonial literature is pressed into disclosing the literal in its figurative modes, the default interpretive stance toward it is apt to be organized by modified versions of the axiom, "The third-world novel will not offer the satisfactions of Proust or Joyce" (Jameson, "Third World Literature" 65). The selective representation of Jameson in this decontextualized quotation does not do justice to the complexity of this important critic's attempts to define a new cognitive aesthetics for Third World literature in the essay famously refuted by Ahmad or to his impressive contributions to Marxist aesthetics, even if it captures something of the tenor of the academic world's generally limited attempt to seek satisfaction in the aesthetic dimension of postcolonial literature. Indeed, one might turn to Jameson himself as a

potential ally in the revitalization of such a project, given his enduring interest in questions of ideology alongside the predicament of utopian thought and political imagination; his attempts, particularly in his later work, to think totality athwart difference; his regard for aesthetic figuration as related to praxis; and his sustained admiration of the dialectical quality of Adorno's theoretical writings.

Those aesthetic theories that place the particular in a productive, sometimes negative, dialectic with the universal and that accord the aesthetic a privileged space for this negotiation are especially important at a time when postcolonial literature is increasingly read either without the sociolinguistic and area-based knowledge that illuminates its peculiarity and its more locally inspired struggles, or when historically grounded readings are parsed in so localized a way as to leave it no larger ground on which it may be relevant more expansively—to reveal, for instance, answers to what it means to be human at century's end and at the cusp of a new millennium. The perceived reasons for the radical successes of postcolonialism are no less responsible for the relative indifference to post-colonial literature's aesthetic dimension. "Postcolonial writing," Robert Young suggests, "has achieved a revolution in aesthetics and the aesthetic criteria of the literary," ensuring that "writing is now valued as much for its depiction of representative minority experience as for its aesthetic qualities" ("Ideologies of the Postcolonial" 7). The revision of the very notion of what constitutes literature is a part of this revolution: "In institutional terms," Young continues, "postcolonialism has radically changed the criteria of what makes authentic art by challenging the cultural capital from which notions of the literary were derived" (7). Although this stance permits the recovery of hitherto alienated cultural products (often only in limited ways), an unfortunate corollary of this challenge can be the devaluation of the literariness of literature in the politically correct classroom. The quest for "representative minority experience" can sometimes proceed unfettered by consideration of the loss and surplus of meaning produced by aesthetic representation even when there is an accounting for the inherence of meaning in *eidos* (form).

A critical approach based on the approximation of the aesthetic to the thematic kernel and its political import—effected through a

redefinition of the literary and undergirded by a reading of the epistemic as empirical—carries the threat of premature historical closures that defeat both the literary and the political project of postcolonialism. The task of criticism cannot be content with a reckoning of text and context alone; it must confront the challenge of its *con*-texts, that is, its subterfuge and evasion as well. Even colonial literature, we would do well to recall, was accorded the courtesy of contrapuntal readings by Edward Said. A similar insistence with regard to postcolonial literature is overdue not only as disciplinary courtesy but as a valuable key to its complex relationship to its conditions of possibility.

The World in the Text

For a long season, so great was the heft of conventional practice, so entrenched the fear of universalism, and so bitter the memory of battle with the tyranny of the canon waged precisely on the exclusive grounds of aesthetics that it would have seemed provocatively conservative to agitate for aesthetic considerations. Moreover, the rooting of most discussions on aesthetics in Western philosophy and values was, and is still, likely to give many a postcolonial critic pause. Fanon's suspicions of "Western values" and "collections of dead words" that "have nothing to do with the concrete conflict in which the people is engaged" continue to ring in our ears, warning us away from the abdication of concrete material goals (43–47). A recent resurgence of interest in aesthetics, however, has sought to resuscitate its value both for the literary and the political project.[7] This project, moreover, has drawn its force from a thoughtful return to Marxist aesthetics rather than in a turn away from it. The proliferation of practices encompassed by Marxist aesthetics render the above observation somewhat ambiguous, but in the particular strain developed by Frankfurt School theorists, and in subsequent elaborations by critics such as Eagleton and Jameson, the value of aesthetic thought is its nondominative relation to the object, and art is the favored arena for exploring this contract. Notwithstanding categorization into better and worse sorts of Marxist practice, the various conceptualizations offered by these theorists nonetheless return us to the question of the relationship between aesthetics

and politics in a dialectical mode. Among more contemporary critics identified with the left, aesthetics is not only being reconciled to liberatory politics but is seen as central to it.[8]

Although there is obvious value for the postcolonial project in this reconjugation of aesthetics, the particular history of postcolonial studies alerts us to a twofold danger in its uninflected application: first, that this perception of aesthetics deployed without an apprehension of the historical positional status of postcolonial literature can slide into shallow politicking by other means; second and subsequent, that this will effect an even more efficient displacement of other, more compelling, and necessary forms of political representation, and indeed even of other forms of cultural expression that do not adhere to the terms of an aesthetics developed largely in Western terms. A consideration of the contributions of artistic endeavors to social goals in elite texts must necessarily proceed with the cautions outlined above. Moreover, even if it cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to the project of conceiving the shape of this world outside the logic of instrumental and exploitative rationalism, aesthetic redemption is no substitute for a world redeemed in actuality.[9] Indeed, the distance between the two may serve as one of the more political of literary goals. If it does not follow that high literature is politically of *no* consequence, then, neither can we assume that it is the only expression of any consequence.

We do no service, therefore, either to our political goals or to literature if we do not attend to the specific modality of literary representation in these texts, a modality that illuminates the manner in which the artwork is limited by sociopolitical realities but can potentially contribute something of nuance to its determinative and confining script. Ideological determination and historical conditions, crosshatched with auctorial intent and the internal logic of the text, produce both its limits and its value. Philosophically, something of the gap between articulation and subjective intention is captured in the Hegelian formation, “We mean more than we meant to mean” (39). In literary representation, moreover, both language and form mediate representation, creating a design that is poorly weighed by the standards of instrumental reason that prevail in the world of commodities.[10] The brand of criticism Eagleton dubs “good old-fashioned content analysis” need not be abandoned so much as

that it needs to be processed through aesthetic literary filters to reveal the disjunctures and contributions, indeed the peculiarity, of literary representation ("In the Gaudy Supermarket"). The notion of the aesthetic as a philosophical value must therefore join with that of the operation of aesthetics in a literary modality. The very peculiarity (*Kulonosség* for Georg Lukács or *Besonderheit* in the work of the German thinkers) of the aesthetic project defines its resistance and its limit. The notion of the aesthetic as a value both philosophical and literary also evades the pitfalls of yet another sort of reductionism of the study of poetics to the closures effected by a strictly, and atomistically defined, ethicopolitical project of representation. In these texts, it is precisely the distance and tension between the aesthetic and the political that reveals the contributions of the former in the face of the dominative logic of the latter, even as it underscores the importance of understanding their separation and isolation from each other. A dialectical rationale mobilizes the artwork's truth-content *(Wahrheitsgehalt)* against its more transparent social content *(gesellschaftlicher Gehalt)*.

Aesthetic activity remains necessary for the full emancipation of the human senses, as Marx had suggested, without always yielding a transparently political program.[11] In order to unlock the potential and eccentric contribution of the elite postcolonial text to the emancipatory project, therefore, the critical apparatus brought to bear upon it must consider not only its ideological coordinates, and the prevailing means of production, but its aesthetic and literary mode of production as well. No less important is a serious reconsideration of the question of its political "impact," which may be indirect if it can be measured at all, against that of its aesthetic "import," which an attentive reading must struggle to recuperate. If the overvaluation of all that is contained within the category of the aesthetic has traditionally been perceived as a political problem from the viewpoint of radical criticism, its undervaluation in "practical" postcolonial criticism, as this book shows, is scarcely without ideological investment. The construction of the "postcolonial" through a rigorously selective and epistemologically violent disciplinization and the normalization of certain forms of critical practice are thus related problems. If criticism is prone to attach too much meaning to artistic and intellectual expression as political work, as the

many critics of post-colonialism rightly charge, it is also true that a criticism uninterested in exploring its aesthetic dimension will fail to glean its possible contribution to the emancipatory project.

Native Intelligence

The quality Theodor Adorno characterized as the cognitive and rational content of art remains undervalued in the evaluation of postcolonial literature.[12] It is in this sense that the term "native intelligence"—derived as the implied other from Seamus Heaney's use of the term "challenger's intelligence" in the poem "Hercules and Antaeus"—is pertinent to the commencement of an investigation into the aesthetic organization of mimesis and representation in postcolonial literature. In the prevalent schematic, however, the term would have a very different valence.[13] The two terms exist as copula rather than compound in this construction, emphasizing the existence of the subject of postcoloniality in relational terms with its First World sponsor. On this view, it is not inherent perception or insightfulness that prevails as the primary connotation but rather the notion of a field constructed on the expectation of intelligence *from* the native in a form that is intelligible, in other words, as native informancy. The construal of postcolonial as "native" occurs in the following ways: etymologically the term "native" stems from the Latin verb *nasci,* to be born. A native is thus etymologically (in the "true sense" if we were to consult the meaning of "etymology" itself) attached to the land and place of birth.[14] The connection to a particular locus creates a pendent association with authenticity; the importance of location in postcolonial studies is thus almost predictable. The de facto prominence of the Third World as a geographically authentic place of origin likewise, the term "native" being more readily associated with the darker races peopling the Third World. Of course, the Third World is also a conceptual and ideological space identified with marginality and/or subversion, as long as there is some socially recognizable coordinate—such as origin or race—with which this space can overlap. Although the prominence of concepts such as "diaspora" and "transnationalism" confirm Young's observations about postcolonialism's reversal of the premises of earlier foundationalism grounded in "race and

attachment to land," the "postcolonial" nevertheless functions within a conceptual scheme for Third Worldliness.[15]

If the postcolonial writer's distance from a *truly* Third World ideological space defined by abjection, almost total disenfranchisement, and voicelessness is a persistent irritant, it has scarcely constituted grounds sufficient to discard "transnationally" available representations as long as their works are susceptible to some analysis of the themes associated with Third Worldliness. Within the cultural logic of late capitalism, the very compression and confusion of space produces an ever greater reactive valuation of place-based identity. The attribute of aggregate Third Worldliness is one of many that is associated with postcolonialism and has successfully prevented any meaningful attention to the internal striation of the Third World on the one hand and the complexity and contradictions of such items as "First World," "white," and "Europe" on the other, despite the vaunted space-time compression that allegedly characterizes the postmodern condition.

The emphasis on true location and appropriate origins thus engenders a notion of the native as a subject possessing authentic knowledge uncomplicated by the mystification of language, or that of subject construction, or that of aesthetic composition.[16] In this sense, native elite in transnationalism may be elite but can nevertheless be coded as native with regard to the question of representation. Yet, since the native also carries a trace of the now-obsolete sense of being "a born thrall," he or she is also seen as being transparently scripted by defeat and capitulation to a new order determined by the challenger's intelligence. The bogey of authenticity thus stalks the postcolonial text alongside the troublesome goblin of willful underperception on the grounds that everything enunciated and circulated either reproduces a metropolitan and First World mindset or is ideally intelligible through it. The projection of a metropolitan reader as the target, if phantom, audience has additional repercussions for the way in which the text is interpreted. Prevailing therefore—in tandem with the twin expectations of authenticity and intelligibility—is the apprehension of intelligence as information and of the postcolonial critic and writer as native informant to a demanding and needy metropolitan audience.[17]

There are, of course, as I have suggested above, other ways of

decoding “native intelligence.” Perceived as inherently radical and transformative, postcolonialism also functions as a useful corrective, or at least as a challenge to the prevailing hegemonic ideology. Its capacity for resistant critique and its success and sophistication are so highly esteemed that postcolonial terminology now infuses virtually any theoretically resistant move in the academy, whether it be in native American or composition studies. Cookie-cutter postcolonial formulae are now applied to any generic situation in which power and its lack are the operative issues. Something of the idea of “native intelligence” as innate wit and perception survives in this understanding of the import of post-colonialism. Within contexts that lie beyond metropolitan understanding, however, it has little purchase. Harish Trivedi notes in “India and Post-Colonial Discourse” that “post-colonial discourse as at present globally constituted hardly begins to address either the post-colonial situation in India or its post-colonial literature except in some incidental and tangential ways” (243). In a depressing continuation of old attitudes, the languages of the native continue to be unintelligible to the field’s primary audience; hence the almost total absence of vernacular language literatures in the field of postcolonial studies and the discomfort evinced at the use of native words without an accompanying glossary.

“Native intelligence” as a mode of perception relevant within its own context is usually beyond the scope and interest of metropolitan discourse. The postcolonial as an alternative and valuable mode of perception that functions meaningfully within its own context has yet to be accorded due recognition. Given the march of the new world order and its associated regime of intellectual property rights, a serious consideration of a viable native intelligence is desirable not only as a conceptual prospect but as one that is crucial to the survival of threatened knowledge systems in the postcolony. Ways of knowing that have allowed sustainability and survival among postcolonial communities are similarly unlikely to command serious attention because they would require dedicated engagement with a context unavailable to most metropolitan audiences. “Native intelligence” as that which is inborn, in the sense of stirring within an indigenous context marked by its own particular anxieties and desires, also remains undertheorized, its complexities offering little allure to

disciplinarily practical postcoloniality. Hence, too, the termination of the search for meaning at the limits of metropolitan understanding. The notion of the postcolonial text possessing its own structure of meaning in a fluid rather than transparent relation to its semantic content is thus also undervalued because of the current emphasis on representation and narrowly conceived political positioning. Similarly, the process of distillation by which literature creates "*modèles réduits*" (Claude Lévi-Strauss's term) of the phenomenal world (thus rendering it inviting to perception) is apt to be misread as an attempt at yielding the representative rather than the representational.[18]

Yet neither of these sets of apprehensions of "native intelligence" is truer than the other. Although it is tempting to posit "native intelligence" as the obverse of "native informancy" for purposes of operational clarity, the two are intertwined etymologically, conceptually, and pragmatically, preventing us from capitulating to romanticized notions of literary intelligence as unsullied by worldly considerations, but also enjoining upon us the need to recognize its intricate and disjunctive relationship to them. Each operates dialectically in a manner both self-affirming and self-negating, as creative as it is collusive, as inscrutable as it is reductive. Given these variant connotations, the phrase "native intelligence," as it occurs throughout this book, serves a heuristic rather than stable descriptive function, capturing some of the elements of the conceptual grid used to map postcoloniality in metropolitan discourse, suggesting others that have unfortunately escaped it and gesturing at those that resist identification. Operating in multiple modes and registers, native intelligence slides between solipsism, informancy, and apprehension. In the literary artwork, these competing codes create both communication and dissonance, requiring improvised engagement and an ear for contradictions.

From the standpoint of this model, criticism conceptually "involves an 'aesthetic' responsiveness to the particularity of its object alien to . . . dominative rationality" (Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin* 117). In its disruption of conventional patterns of communication, the literary text makes of comprehension a moving target, inviting us to transform seizure into caesura and recognize the text's evasion of a conclusive grasp. A mode of reading that accepts the necessary pause and allows the reader to

inhabit the experience of being confounded presents us with a way of understanding the challenge of communication across differences and the ethical positions necessary to it. The pressures exerted on the text by the codifying impulses of the practical discipline threaten to flatten its dimensions. In practicing a different sort of discipline—in its noninstitutional and more investigative sense—the reader is pressed to restrain the impatient impulse to capture and control the wayward text, becoming more attentive to the challenges of its aesthetic dimension and its nonpropositional cognitive content. This sort of discipline and attention toward the literary text is not easily achieved under any circumstances; in light of the evolution of postcolonial studies as a "practical" discipline under the aegis of a social economy defined by late capitalism and of the place of postcolonial literature within it, the conditions for honoring the Sisyphean labor of interpretation threaten to disappear almost completely. It is not only creative production, then, that is defined and delimited by the conditions of production, but also the socialized activity of interpretation.

The Text and the World

The first two chapters of my study examine the circumstances of the rise of postcolonial studies as a disciplinary entity in order to locate the texts within specific conditions of emergence and underline the preferred coding of "native intelligence" as informancy. The formation of the discipline of postcolonial studies and the emergence of "key concepts" and key exclusions are detailed in the first chapter of *Native Intelligence.*

Yet another account of the rise of the field hardly seems warranted given the existing profusion of information on the subject, were it not for the suppression of a comparative literary history in most chronicles and the relative oblivion to which the practical discipline's exclusions are already subject. Chapter 1 undertakes two levels of discussion. The first establishes the shape of what Epifanio San Juan calls "establishment postcolonialism" through an investigation of the self-reinforcing mechanisms of institutional practice while the second suggests the importance of comparative analysis with the histories of other literary areas in

the academy. The self-fortifying mechanisms of institutional practice, as Michel Foucault has elaborated in *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* set in motion the process of manufacturing the field—a process of closing ranks, sealing off alternative trajectories, and suturing together incompatible, even contradictory, realities. The fabrication of an official "beginning" for the field and the subsequent succession of pedagogic readers, critical publications, and electronic exchanges have rapidly forged a predictable postcoloniality, burying the traces of older histories and alternative trajectories. Regardless of the sophistication of postcolonial theory, and its internal dissensions, a "practical" version of the field nevertheless begins to develop, producing a shape intimately tied to the socioeconomic conditions of its possibility, and succumbing to the same logic of the Enlightenment project of modernity that was to give most forms of knowledge their predictable and practical shape in the configurations of disciplinarity.

A practical rather than logical coherence reliant on deliberate misprision and selective perception has thus been produced in the course of the institutionalization of postcolonial studies, resulting in predictable bibliographic choices and a hermetic systematicity. In this blinkered view, history begins with European colonialism, and the globe is the unit of analysis, with the global its scale and the present and near-past its operative lens. At the same time that it is conceived on a staggeringly expansive scale, disciplinary postcoloniality thus grants little conceptual space to precolonial histories, internal colonialism, or local anticolonial struggles. It is not so much that these topics cannot be discussed under the umbrella of postcolonial studies than that they are not fundamentally constitutive parts of the theoretical conception of the field. The result of these strategic choices and self-reinforcing practices is a poco postcolonial, to borrow from the language of music, that is, a little, a somewhat, a sort of postcolonialism that has been manufactured in response to various needs in First World academic coordinates, making it a thoroughly "modern" discipline focused on the immediately experienced present and its readily glimpsed antecedents.

Thus constructed, a disciplined and predictable form of postcoloniality enters the academic and social arena, confounding any deep understanding of the economic and political realities of a

postcolonial world whose sheer size, if not its internal diversities, complexities, and saving grays, ought to have rendered it immune from such violently formulaic reductions. Because of its sui generis aura and its construction by restrictively presentist, globalist, and political stipulations, moreover, potentially valuable comparisons with fields such as American literature, feminist studies, and African American literature are seldom pursued.

Disciplinary postcoloniality achieves the illusion of coherence by operating within a global and macroscopic scale that gives a general picture by blurring specific histories. The "difference" of postcoloniality usually emerges in a macroscopic scale of three worlds. To demonstrate this, I readjust the scopic mechanism in chapter 2 to focus on a specific case that is all but absent from the customary postcolonial catalog, that of the missing Irish. The analysis of the "conspicuous" exclusion of the Irish experience from "most theorizations of the postcolonial," as Luke Gibbons has noted, exposes the foundational premises of postcolonialism ("Ireland" 27). Chapter 2 investigates the Irish challenge to placid assumptions about race, geographical economics, and complicity in imperialism—criteria which are typically used to omit the Irish from the postcolonial roster. If we were to isolate the operative principles behind the criteria used to exclude the Irish from dominant theorizations of postcoloniality, we would find that many of the complexities and discrepancies associated with the Irish experience are scarcely absent from ersatz paradigmatic postcolonial cases, even if they differ in degree and form. It is only largely speaking that the differences of race and geography upon which the exclusion of the Irish is primarily based obtains with any coherence. In a smaller comparative framework, difference reveals itself in a more intimate scale.

The goal of this discussion is not so much to settle the question of Irish eligibility for postcolonial status as it is, finally, to explore the implications of this scopic difference for literature that is uncontroversially defined as postcolonial. The kind of identity formation that attaches to postcolonial literature implies critical stances with expectations of certain kinds of representation. These expectations, coupled with the prevalent emphasis on literature as social, even anthropological text, comprise the historically contingent environment of the postcolonial literary text. A critical stance focused on aesthetics, however, exposes the limits of the

artwork by challenging its authority as historical and social document while also uncovering more complex forms of value beyond its exchange-value as a commodity among commodities in a global marketplace.

Chapter 2 concludes with a sample reading of Seamus Heaney's Hercules/Antaeus poems from *North* to introduce the quandary facing the postcolonial critic: how to respond to the writer who tackles the stuff of history and politics through the medium of aesthetics. I choose Heaney's poetry to illustrate this dilemma even though both Irish literature and poetry are anomalous to the postcolonial canon. I take this doubly anomalous route to introduce a prototypical postcolonial dilemma, however, because the borders of hegemonic postcolonial identity are particularly relevant to the redirection of the agenda of postcolonial criticism. In the contentious arena of Irish identity, as chapter 2 demonstrates, the contradictions of disciplinary postcoloniality are more clearly revealed as its borders are exposed. Alongside the Irish challenge to hegemonic postcoloniality, I join the challenge of the poetic to the task of interpretation. For the purposes of introducing the central problem for post-colonial criticism, a reading of Heaney's two short poems allows me to broach key issues with an economy unavailable to me in the reading of longer postcolonial works. More significantly, the use of poetry to introduce the critical problem in a study otherwise devoted to fictional and novelistic representations is intended to draw attention to considerations of genre. Poetry is more likely to invite acknowledgment of its formal and aesthetic modality, complexities less readily granted to prose genres. Not only is the challenge greater in the reading of prose works, but it must be the more forcefully and frontally confronted because of it.

Chapter 3 introduces Frankfurt School aesthetic theory as represented in the work of Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Herbert Marcuse. The aesthetic theories of the thinkers of this school—with which Benjamin is somewhat peripherally associated—are distinguished by an engagement with the interpenetration of the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural spheres. Although Max Horkheimer and Leo Lowenthal were also concerned with aesthetic theory and cultural critique, Adorno, Benjamin, and Marcuse were the critics who wrote most extensively on aesthetics and artistic form. Their ideas, hardly reducible to a unity, often

mutually contentious, and unevenly valued by the standard of Marxist aesthetics, provide something like a flexible grid for suggesting a critical aesthetics founded in a commitment to social justice, and the search for what *can* be alongside what *is.* Their reevaluation of capitalism as well as of orthodox Marxist aesthetics indicted both without abandoning the truths of Marxism. As Eagleton observes in his introduction to *Marxist Literary Theory,* the strengths of this version of Marxist criticism lie in "exploring what might be called the *ideology of form,* and so avoiding at once a mere formalism of the literary work and a vulgar sociologism of it" (11).

One cannot disregard the particular historical and modernist inflection of these theories (save, perhaps, for some of Marcuse's more recent work) and the aporetic moments unavoidable given the largely Euro-centric formulation of their theories (again, perhaps, with the exception of Marcuse whose quarrel with Adorno over Third World movements is well documented in their correspondence) and their personal experiences with fascism. Yet the inexhaustibility of their ideas is evident in the growing interest in their relevance for contemporary contexts (yet again, perhaps, with the exception of Marcuse who enjoyed far greater popularity than either Adorno or Benjamin in the seventies and is now undeservedly neglected). Moreover, to borrow the method so dear to Benjamin, a montage-like view of disparate historical moments over the past century offers renewed reason for considering postcolonial production in light of Frankfurt School Marxist aesthetics. If postcolonial literature, particularly of the "transnational" and cosmopolitan variety, is not outside this historical moment, neither is it completely contemporaneous with it. The similarities of this with the modernist moment can be proposed without capitulating to linear narratives of history that make of time and progress an arbiter of human value, or neglecting what Johannes Fabian calls "the politics of time" (x). At the same time, post-colonial literature also "happens" within postmodern time, a perspective unavailable to these theorists, even if the relevance of their ideas, Adorno's in particular, is being rediscovered within a postmodern framework. As this theory "travels" into postcolonial contexts, a species of translation is unavoidable, with inevitable lacks as well as useful modifications.

The final three chapters are devoted to the development of such

a *Sprachkritik*. The featured writers, Rohinton Mistry, Salman Rushdie, and Arundhati Roy, stand within the mainstream of a soi-disant marginal and radical field. The choice of writers whose literary material is drawn largely from India and Indian culture is a deliberate one. No less deliberate is the selection of highly canonical postcolonial writers. If these choices seem to reinscribe the status of India as paradigmatically postcolonial (thus Third World, thus marking privilege as well as loss), they are nevertheless founded in a commitment to explore diversity through depth rather than the more customary breadth of coverage, and to zero in on what I have earlier referred to as difference in an *intimate* rather than only in a globally scopic scale. Each of the authors discussed is interested in exploring this diversity as an internally meaningful value that gives the lie to a metropolitan multiculturalism founded on racial difference and undifferentiated cultural identity. Moreover, hybridity and diaspora emerge in these texts as phenomena with a long and increasingly undervalued history, challenging the largely presentist understanding of their complexity. Sameness and difference are no less factors of scopic perspective than they are of sociopolitical construction. Intimate difference need not, however, be more or less significant than that operative in a larger scale. Rather, their coexistence must remain a persistent and unavoidable challenge both in the understanding of postcoloniality and in the quest for a political program.

A second reason for the selection of these texts is their flamboyantly hegemonic status in the counter-canon. Each of the texts under consideration has won at least one major literary prize. If omissions and exclusions tell one story, the successful postcolonial text is no less revelatory of the ideological underpinnings of the global cultural marketplace. Aijaz Ahmad's comments on the process of canon formation insightfully convey its mechanics thus:

> The axiomatic fact about *any* canon formation, even when it initially takes shape as a counter-canon, is that when . . . the desired literary typology is

> constructed, the canonizing agency selects certain kinds of authors, texts, styles, and criteria of classification and judgement, privileging them over others which may also belong in the same period, arising out of the same space of production, but which manifestly fall outside the principles of inclusion enunciated by that selfsame agency. (*In Theory* 123)

My purpose, in part, is to focus on canonical authors in order to isolate some of the "principles of inclusion" that uncover the shape of metropolitan postcoloniality. Textual compliance with ideological demands is an undoubted precondition of literary success. In an administered world, artists "are a commodity like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market" (Marx, quoted in Berman 133). The market's very need for novelty, however, enables the production of "newness" and innovation. Although formal innovations and the commonly found linguistic innovations of postcolonial literature need not necessarily be revolutionary in themselves, the very separation of the artwork from the author that the market also effects can provide for an interesting critical stance: one that permits the recovery of radical ideas and conceptual innovations that also derive from the needs and logic of the market. A critical method that can recuperate this novelty from the stranglehold of the logic of exchange society recognizes it as productively resistant, in however limited a fashion, thus preventing it from melting away ineffectually.

My more important purpose, therefore, is to explore the aesthetic codes for a political project within these canonical texts along with the limitations imbricated with their very canonicity, whether we are faced with the literary realism of *Such a Long Journey,* the postmodern "textual plenitude" of Rushdie's works, or the predominantly modernist modes employed in *The God of Small*

Things. Without surrendering the importance of postcolonial literature as a historical product, therefore, a critical method derived from philosophical aesthetics can uncover its engagement with unfulfilled needs and desires that are inexpressible through the mechanisms of discursive rationality. By selecting canonical works that also represent this range of formal choices, I hope to emphasize two points: first, that what Jameson, and later Brennan, refer to as the "geopolitical aesthetic" is here inflected variously in the different approaches to the problem of utopia; and second, that innovation and resistance to instrumental rationality need not be confined to the more predictably avant-garde among the genres employed—as Adorno insists. Literary realism need no more be epistemologically naive than postmodern literature necessarily transgressive. Whether the text employs a largely realist, modern, or postmodern repertoire of strategies—to the extent that these modalities can be strictly defined, used, or identified— each can be studied through the lens of dialectical aesthetics to reveal the complexities of content becoming form, part forming the whole, and the whole relating to the worlds of empirical reality as well as aesthetic and sensual experience.

Chapter 4, "The Economy of Postcolonial Literature" begins with an account of the critical reception of Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* in the Northern press to index critical strategies geared toward consumption. Loosely classifiable as a realist novel, this is the sort of text most prone to seizure as transparent representation because it is apt to be viewed as *volkstümlich* (popular) in form and therefore congruent with principles of identity rather than opposition. This formal choice, combined with the consideration of the economy of the postcolonial in a market oriented toward the center poses a particular problem. The First World orientation of postcolonial studies is apparent in the kind of theoretical apparatuses used in the reading of postcolonial literature, the rigging of syllabi for the postcolonial classroom by market and self-reinforcing mechanisms, pedagogic approaches that privilege authorized themes, and a pervasively influential domestic politics that assumes the capacity of literature to represent, more or less transparently, those other to the metropolitan self. Even if we conceded that it was the novel's primary aim to represent these other realities, how does *Such a Long Journey* demonstrate the architectonics of what Marcuse

refers to as "content having become form"? (*Aesthetic Dimension* xii). In a shift from the primary context of audience reception ("consumption" for Adorno) of the text as consonant with *Volkstümlichkeit,* a study of the poetics of the novel ("production" for Adorno) reveals that language and figurative devices constitute potent challenges to expectations of transparent representation in the postcolonial text, even in the realist form. Meaning disperses itself throughout the form, reflected in language as well as architectonic structure, resisting relation to single determinants. To treat this literature as if it were a ripening pod, ready to dehisce and spill the beans barely contained along the seam between political and aesthetic representation is to strip it of its productive distinction from social processes and to reduce it to mere functionality. Adorno reminds us in quoting Schoenberg that the painter paints a picture rather than what it represents (*Aesthetic Theory* 4). What is represented in the literary text is meaningful within its immanent logic, even if it offers analogies to the complexities and challenges of the real world. Its resistance to seizure, captured in *Such a Long Journey* through the intervention of multiply derived "languages" and its dominant metaphor of the wall, functions as the cryptogram for a dialectical relation to the "other" and for interpretation as a Sisyphean labor that must surrender meaning even as it seems to attain it.

A reading attentive to the aesthetic and literary modes of signification thus aids in a modest revival of the language metaphor for cultural interaction; this conception of translation across difference commands recognition of incommensurability alongside the insistence on the need to meet its challenges, reconceptualizing engagement with the other in dialectical terms, and preserving the mysteries along with the possibilities of social intercourse. Finally, as a text that "realistically" represents the world in the text, the novel's engagement with "utopia," a concept that appears nowhere in the novel itself, inheres not in its thematic treatment of the topic but rather in the process of "stylizing" the world in miniature and thus challenging the conditions of reality. "The only requirement" for a "historical reality" to challenge the world, Marcuse maintains, is that "it must be *stylized,* subjected to aesthetic 'formation'" (*Aesthetic Dimension* 44). It is "the estranging language" of the literary text that makes "perceptible, visible, and audible that which is no longer, or not

yet perceived, said, and heard in everyday life" (72). The text's negative intercourse with the concept of "utopia" proceeds in part through its affirmation by indictment and in part through its extratextual allusions within the overall design of the novel, suggesting a structural principle rather than a descriptive or pictorial image.

Chapter 5 explores two central postcolonial terms in Rushdie's work: subalternity and hybridity, which appear as concerns that are obviously thematic, certainly ideological, but also aesthetic in *Midnight's Children*, *Shame,* and *The Moor's Last Sigh.* Rushdie's own treatment of the theme of subalternity—rather than of subalterns, as I demonstrate—is then discussed in terms of aesthetic representation that proceeds through the mode of de-scription rather than description. By consciously resituating Rushdie's works within their native context, aesthetically and culturally, chapter 5 seeks to demonstrate the complexity of Rushdie's treatment of commonplace postcolonial themes such as hybridity and migration in a local rather than transnational framework.

In many of his works, Rushdie is committed to an invocation of the memory beyond the moment of colonialism through a repeated return to the themes of migration and diaspora in precolonial experience. In a dramatic reversal in *The Moor's Last Sigh,* Rushdie's (and by direct association postcolonialism's) celebration of impurity and hybridity are soberly challenged by an apprehension of the dangers of a world so bereft of certainties and so immersed in the delusions of pluralism that it threatens to become a world devoid of all certainty and value. Hybridity is recoded in this novel as a *fleur du mal* as Rushdie pursues, like Baudelaire and Benjamin before him, the drama of the changing city in the grip of contemporary forces. The aestheticization of the city of Bombay as sensate body and its subsequent "death" powerfully enact the drama of the aesthetic in the face of empirical reality, of representation mediated and displaced by its own irreducible other. Against this nightmare vision of entropy, the text struggles to retain the prospect of a utopia that never was, in an ultimate gesture of compensation that only reiterates its loss.

In the final chapter, I propose for consideration the Benjaminian figure of the postcolonial storyteller as instantiated by "the Kathakali Man" in Arundhati Roy's much publicized debut novel *The God of Small Things.* Kathakali, a dance form based on

old epics of challenge and defeat, provides the central trope in this chapter for my analysis of storytelling in the age of globalization. The Kathakali Man, who "has magic in him" and whose entire being is "harnessed wholly to the task of storytelling" has become, the narrator argues, "unfeasible" (219). Yet the poetic principle underlying the novel's structure is uncannily similar to that of the "Great Stories" that Kathakali tells, as Roy herself describes them in terms remarkably reminiscent of Benjamin's. The cyclicality of the novel and its structuring by the principle of regressive memory emphasize the evernew as nevernew, of the story itself as a retelling rather than a telling. The paradoxical gesture of lamenting the end of the story and the mortgaging of the storyteller to the market while retelling anew a story supposedly as old as time obliges us to ask: How do we receive the cognitive content of the postcolonial novel at a time when novelty is at a premium, the quest for more, better information is the order of the day? The novel's attempt to inform on the depredations of development and the impact of globalization makes it a classic postcolonial text of what Lazarus calls the "mourning after" decolonization on the one hand and a newsy testament to transnationalism on the other. If the politics of representation would demote story to information, isolate it into insignificant particularity, and consign it to the expendability that attends novelty, the formal structure of the novel consistently undermines the newness of the information presented. Structured by the logic of now and then, then and now, the novel is an aesthetic re-counting that transforms the new into an already known story saturated with history. In refusing to submit to the shock of the new in the mode of the story's telling, the novel recasts the singular event into the timeless framework of ever-presence; in refusing to relinquish its singularity, it foregrounds individual "love, hope, and infinnate [sic] joy" as the basis for an aesthetic perception of the shape of human liberation. Beyond the quest for a timely political response from the postcolonial text lies another prize: something Benjamin calls "the germinative power" that need not expend itself with its allotted season, that contains a sensuous intelligence for all time that can "survive the moment in which it was new" (*Illuminations* 90). Thus wrenched out of a temporal context, utopia is displaced through the joining of locus and topoi, a commonplace longing for the new that is transported

to the country of imagination.

Clearly, no Archimedean point is claimed for these texts on the basis of their being truly revolutionary or totally above ideology; the point is precisely that it is in their singular and constitutional limitations that we may also find the potential for sublimating the repressions of the order of instrumental rationalism. Despite his affirmative endorsement of art and its revolutionary potential, even Marcuse—the most optimistic of a generally pessimistic côterie—is obliged to admit that the "encounter with the truth of art" occurs in an estranging language and ultimately appeals only to a subject that is "socially anonymous" because "it does not coincide with the potential subject of revolutionary practice" (*Aesthetic Dimension* 32). In his most ringing endorsement of a role for art in the real world, then, Marcuse eschews the fantasy of equivalence. To celebrate the distance of art from life as its uniquely enabling constitutive attribute is thus also to mourn its distance from life as its ultimate limit.[19] Literary singularity, however, remains a valuable symptom of the complexities that confound representation even as it is a reminder of the complex relation between the universal and the particular, and of that between fictional/figurative representation and the political project.

Chapter 1

The Practical Discipline

> With the continuing organization of all cultural spheres, the desire grows to assign art its place in society theoretically and indeed practically; this is the aim of innumerable *round table* conferences and symposia.
>
> —Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*

In a *verwaltete Welt,* a world enmeshed in administration, no cultural product arrives unmediated. The struggle of art to appear autonomous only "call[s] into question a society where nothing is allowed to be itself and everything is subject to the principle of exchange" (Zuidervaart 88). The dwindling of artistic autonomy from the interests of the market is everywhere apparent, even as cultural expression appears to be flourishing globally. Indeed, Graham Huggan has commented on the post-colonial as "sales tag" for "the international commodity culture of late (twentieth-century) capitalism" (24). In his almost poetic explication of Marx's views on culture and the market in *Adventures in Marxism,* Marshall Berman explains,

> Marx does not expect that great ideas and works will fall stillborn for want of a market: the modern bourgeoisie is remarkably resourceful in wringing profit out of thought. What will happen instead is that creative processes and products

> will be used and transformed in ways that will dumbfound or horrify their creators. But the creators will be powerless to resist, because they must sell their labor power in order to live. (134)

Within the economy so presciently envisioned by Marx, writers who "wish to strike back against the center," as Huggan phrases it, nevertheless "write and are marketed for it" (24).

Representation through literature thus emerges as an ethical and political issue with a distinctly economic dimension that interfaces with the educational apparatus. Representations from the periphery are rewarded through institutional prizes like the Booker in England or the Governor General's in Canada. Mistry's novel, one may recall, was shortlisted for the former and did win the latter. Rushdie and Roy's novels too have won a Booker each. Huggan reports that "of the twenty-seven Booker prizewinners to date [1994] . . . , no fewer than seventeen deal with Empire" (26). This sort of support for certain sorts of postcolonial cultural production, virtually tantamount to corporate sponsorship, is not a phenomenon discrete from the increasing financialization of most spheres of activity; it emphasizes, in fact, that the timing has been particularly propitious for the rise of postcolonial studies on account of the explosion in the international book trade in the last quarter of this century and the appetite of this market for novelty. The resistance of the cultural product only reinforces the elasticity and resilience of the market system, constantly satisfying its quest for novelty. An acknowledgment of the existence of the postcolonial text within a managed and administered intellectual sphere is a crucial preliminary to critical analysis. The making of a practical discipline of postcolonial studies, the standardization of expectations and responses, and the normalization of these practices thus constitute the subject of this chapter.

Few topics are likely to clear a room more quickly than a proposed consideration of the rise of postcolonial studies. Old hat, all that, and typically prone to generating more heat than light. There is remarkable consensus by now about the limitations and

obfuscations of the term, even if the available criticism on the topic also betrays a surprising capacity for mutual inconsistencies, as Hall, among others, has noted in "When Was the 'Post-Colonial'?"[1] Tracing the footsteps of pioneering worthies, too, is now best treated as footnote material and the complications of the term accepted as inconvenient but by now unremarkable impedimenta that nevertheless do not really impede discussion at all. The field continues to flourish as a practical discipline, in some measure because of the very inconsistencies and obfuscations so long bemoaned. The impatient reader may thus rest assured that those old chestnuts, barring unavoidable exceptions, will remain undisturbed. This chapter is concerned with the unacknowledged and suppressed history of the field in the First World academy, and in the process by which it has come to assume this shape through its determinative elisions and exceptions, thereby suggesting the frame narrative that structures the critical apparatus that has been normalized in the reading of postcolonial literature.

As it comes to enjoy subdisciplinary status within the humanities, and most often in English departments, the field has incurred (un)due respect as well as resentment, a consequence of what Paul de Man once referred to as "magnification or minimalization" in *The Resistance to Theory:* "If a cat is called a tiger it can easily be dismissed as a paper tiger. . . . The same tactic works in reverse: calling the cat a mouse and then deriding it for its pretense to be mighty" (5). Postcolonial theory and literature are thus simultaneously imbued with unprecedented transformative powers and exaggerated hopes for social change on the one hand and dismissed as overly reductive and excessively institutionalized on the other. These constraints, coupled with a phenomenon economists have theorized as "self-reinforcing mechanism"[2] and one Michel Foucault more familiarly describes as disciplinization, account for many of the problems we have come to recognize as the postcolonial predicament.

The deterministic blind spots and problems that have become the stuff of discontent are written into the story of the evolution of the field in the Western academy. The rapid disciplinization of the field could only have taken place through attendant practices of inclusion and exclusion. The discernible phase of reinforcement and repeated inter-textual referencing to build a recognizable,

often epigonic, quasicanonical body of texts has been noted by at least one major critic. The hardening—quick-setting in fact—of early practices and assumptions into default foundational elements has by now become an inescapable reality. As in economic systems where "lock-in happens dynamically, as sequential decisions 'groove' out an advantage that the system finds hard to escape from," discursive systems too exert their impersonal tyranny (Arthur 13). The aggregation of what Michel Foucault refers to as "dubious unities" serves as the staple of discursive formation. The discursive practices scattered across the time, genres, and disciplines that constitute an investigation of a particular object of study are not necessarily coextensive with the discipline as such (26). Foucault's thesis is that "in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality" (216). Among the rules of "exclusion" are those that establish the "privileged or exclusive right to speak of a particular subject," the rights accorded, in other words, through the rites of professional passage (216).

The powerful imperative Foucault refers to as the "will to knowledge" is "reliant upon institutional support and distribution" and "tends to exercise a sort of pressure, a power of constraint upon other forms of discourse" (219). Apart from systems of exclusion, there are, Foucault observes, "internal rules, where discourse exercises its own control; rules concerned with the principles of classification, ordering and distribution" (220). Disciplines, he proposes,

> are defined by groups of objects, methods, their corpus of propositions considered to be true, the interplay of rules and definitions, of techniques and tools: all these constitute a sort of anonymous system, freely available to whoever

> wishes, or whoever is able to make use of them, without there being any question of their meaning or their validity being derived from whoever happened to invent them. (222)

Admission in the form of valid entry into the discipline rests on the ability to seem to be *dans le vrai* of the discourse at hand: "It is always possible one could speak the truth in a void; one would only be in the true, however, if one obeyed the rules of some discursive 'policy'" (224). Disciplines serve the purpose of providing a "a system of control in the production of discourse, fixing its limits" (224). A final set of rules concerns "a question of determining the conditions it [discourse] may be employed, of imposing a certain number of rules upon those individuals who employ it, thus denying access to everyone else" (224).

Thanks to efficient disciplinization, the field functions within the logic of what I have earlier referred to, *pace* Heaney, as the "challenger's intelligence." This is the logic responsible for and itself regulated by a regime of noncoercive governmentality, a phenomenon directly associated with the stages of the growth of capital that most Frankfurt School theorists describe as the *verwaltete Welt* and that Max Weber had earlier described as the iron cage of bureaucratic rationality. Claims about the field's postdisciplinarity and inherently interrogative nature notwithstanding, a survey of the evolution of the field of postcolonial studies reveals a mounting accretion of disciplinary raiments that give it predictable shape and ensure a degree of foreseeable repetition.

By now, the "understanding" of the term and the field is based not on transcendent realities but in the context of disciplinization within a particular historical moment established on the terms of the challenger's intelligence. Even more curiously, the tenets of the practical discipline often proceed, not from, but despite the productive complications of these tenets in postcolonial theory. The cultural and intellectual productions of erstwhile European colonies and their modern diaspora are thus being constructed

within the potent crucible of a highly institutionalized educational system as "native intelligence." In the first place, the intelligence provided in the phenomenon of the empire writing back is constructed as an authentic "native" difference that is indigenous by virtue of its particular and by now predictable form and content. Further, it is rendered intelligible through the regularizing mechanisms of the educational institution and its paraphernalia to a primarily First World constituency that supports its production and dissemination by furnishing capital, publishers, readers, and other institutional support. By the same token, certain sorts of postcolonial productions remain unintelligible or discursively and otherwise incapable of being *dans le vrai*.

As a result of a consensual synecdochic fallacy, by now the term has become naturalized through these disciplinary measures, evolving into an ideological artifact with a phantom reality. Its unruliness and inherent uncontainability effectively disciplined, the field has developed along the groove that has proved most profitable to it. In the first place, it is a literary postcoloniality that now dominates as the preferred mode of postcolonial articulation, although this domination, which occurs seriatim, is not always acknowledged. The field's obligation to account for particular historical events and their consequences in a current temporal frame, its assumed raison d'être, is still unchallenged, but the limits and potential of literary and cultural expression in meeting these obligations have yet to be soberly evaluated. Individual authors continue to be castigated for failing to provide a revolutionary vision and a program for change while numerous examples of political and ecological activism in the postcolony scarcely register a meaningful presence in metropolitan discourse. Serious analyses of economic and political realities in the postcolony, likewise, are apt to be sidelined. Literary postcoloniality is nevertheless charged with explaining and addressing these realities, and then criticized for doing it unsatisfactorily. The advantages that have accrued to "going along" with the established groove prevent a clear-sighted appraisal of these contradictions.[3] The dissociation between this literal sense and the more general notion of postcolonialism as a study of power in a more or less Third World or minority context is exposed in the primacy generally accorded to Edward Said's

1978 book, *Orientalism*.[4] The usual proviso that accompanies this pronouncement is that the book be considered the primogenitor not necessarily of postcolonial or anticolonial articulations but of the field of postcolonialism in the First World academy. Older histories of postcolonial expression can thus be accommodated even as they are disavowed by this conspicuous marking of disciplinary origin.

It is perhaps our fascination for neat beginnings that accounts for the relative silence about the field's murkier disciplinary ancestry. Most accounts of the rise of the field fail to acknowledge that in the Anglo-American context, the development and consolidation of programs such as African American, Asian American, and feminist studies provide the crucial background for Said's text as the official beginning. All these fields predate the formal appearance of postcolonial studies in the curriculum and have served as a necessary space clearing for the advent of the latter. On the tails of these important fields, postcolonialism was able to enter the academy after the prerequisite administrative battles had been won for the most part by these earlier pioneers. The importance of the *Critical Inquiry* issue on "Race, Writing, and Difference" (edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr.) in the development of postcolonial studies and its showcasing of prominent postcolonial critics is significant when we consider that, in archival terms, the titular themes were first introduced into the academic lexicon by black intellectuals. Customarily, much is made of the intellectual gemütlichkeit between post-colonialism and poststructuralism/postmodernism at the expense of attention to these connections. The nexus between postcolonialism and its unacknowledged predecessors has received scant attention, so thoroughly is the field saturated with this disciplinary and self-reinforcing sense of official and time-bound rather than conceptual and intellectual beginnings.

It is thus that one of the most significant early models for contemporary postcolonial studies is all but forgotten. Such is the duration of public memory that the development of American literary studies and its naturalization in the academy is curiously unacknowledged as a valuable, and instructive, precursor for today's postcolonial. The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* suggest that "its [the United States's] relationship with the metropolitan centre as it has evolved over the last two centuries has been

paradigmatic for post-colonial literatures everywhere" but they go on to ascribe the dismissal of the U.S.'s "post-colonial nature" to "its current position of power, and the neo-colonizing role it has played," explaining their own omission of a discussion of its texts in the following terms: in the United States, there is "a body of texts far too large even to summarize here" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2, 133). The vast number of postcolonial productions from the better part of the globe, however, has not posed a problem for their taxonomic purposes. Nor, indeed, does the phenomenon of internal colonization in various postcolonies challenge the sort of differential typology that relies on difference only on a global scale.

A more plausible logistic reason for the exclusion of American literature, the authors imply, is its evolution into a national literature—a trajectory entirely desirable for other postcolonial productions and one that need not obviate the transnational dimension of national literature (133). The scopic difference entailed in studying literature within a national/cultural context may well yield richer readings. The conflation of postcoloniality with marginality has also led to a reluctance to envisage American and other white settler cultures as postcolonial, thus blinding us to the potential for illuminating lessons from the experience and cultural productions of these sites through scrupulous comparative analysis. The question, "Is the United States postcolonial?" is now being answered thus: "When used as a descriptive term for the United States, *postcolonial* does not name its past as a white settler colony or its emergence as a neocolonial power; rather, it designates the presence of racial minorities and Third World immigrants" (Sharpe 181). Despite post-colonialism's pretensions to comprehensiveness, the enlightening early history of American literature as resistive and its transformation into a disciplinary entity are issues that play all too small a role in accounts of the rise of postcolonial studies.

A different strand in the development of literary postcolonial studies leads back to the study of commonwealth and ex-colonial literatures in Great Britain and many of its First World postcolonies, excluding the United States till somewhat later. The institution of such inquiry was buttressed by the influx of a steady stream of writers and intellectuals from former colonies that continued a relationship of intellectual and cultural dependency

with a country perceived as a mother country, and London as the symbolic capital and metropolitan point of reference. Among the names one could list from the register of influential post-colonial exports would be those of Henry James, T. S. Eliot, V. S. Naipaul, Caryl Philips, Katherine Mansfield, Buchi Emecheta, and Salman Rushdie. A similar influx of writers and critics from erstwhile colonies into the United States in a somewhat later historical period and its impact on the development of the field here has received far greater attention.

Another submerged segment of the history of the field might thus be sought in the vibrant area of what used to be called commonwealth literature. The links between the tradition of study of commonwealth literature and the development of literary postcolonial studies as we now know it might be deduced from the formative role played by critics from settler colonies, the Australians and Canadians most prominent among them, in the rise of postcolonial studies. As is well known, critics Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, who provided one of the most disciplinarily significant taxonomies of the field, are rooted in a serious and long Australian tradition of the study of commonwealth literature. Their publication in 1989 of *The Empire Writes Back* was of no small importance in accelerating the currency of the term in the First World academy and then the metropolitan academy worldwide. In the introduction to their book, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin use the term "post-colonial" to "cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization [modern European colonization] to the present day" (2). This early and important definition already suggests that the "post" in "postcolonial" would be nominal as far as the historical events of domination and independence were concerned; it was, one assumes, intended by the authors to signal posteriority to the advent of colonialism and possible resistance to it. The authors suggest that this term is to be preferred over others "because it points a way towards a possible study of the effects of colonialism in and between writing in english [sic] and writing in indigenous languages . . . as well as writing in other language diasporas" (24). Whether or not one is apt to agree with their definitions and classifications, the authors' encyclopedic range, their important taxonomic work, and its textbook qualities assured *The Empire Writes Back* a deservedly signal role in the inaugural

moments of the discipline of postcolonial studies. Along with a concurrently growing body of texts, their exertions and impressive scholarship provided—perhaps "created" is a more appropriate word— the necessary moment of clarity that must precede an acceptable launching of a field of study.

But moments of clarity come with an epistemological price tag; in this instance, their influential characterization of postcolonial literatures as emerging "in their present form out of the experience of colonization" and being marked by "the tension with the imperial power, and . . . their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre" regardless of or at least "beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics" has led to an array of default assumptions about the field as it has since developed. The emphasis on the colonial experience predetermines the selection of texts as well as ways of reading them, although this was not necessarily intended by the authors' characterization of what makes postcolonial literature "distinctive" (2).

Too, let us note briefly here that although the authors chose the term "post-colonial" over others "because it points a way towards a possible study of the effects of colonialism in and between writing in english [sic] and writing in indigenous languages . . . as well as writing in other language diasporas," and although it "may well be the case" that vernacular language productions "far outweigh . . . in quantity and quality the work produced in english," they withhold any consideration of these works on the grounds of their own (and other Western critics') inability to evaluate their caliber: "Until much more extensive translations into english from these languages have been produced it is difficult for non-speakers of these languages to judge" (24, 122). This more or less reasonable (and one admits, disarmingly frank) admission nevertheless consolidates the dominance of the English-language text, although other developments in the academy that contribute to this phenomenon can also be noted. Because so much of the support for the field comes from the English and Anglo-American academy, productions in English have been more prominent in the field, bolstered by attention from the aforementioned award-granting institutions. This de facto emphasis on anglophone literature might be ascribed in part to the morphing of commonwealth studies into postcolonial studies in such parts of the world as England, Canada, and Australia.

The dwindling currency of the loosely cognate epithets "Third World" and "commonwealth" can be dated back in specific terms to the set of academic "events" beginning with the publication of Said's *Orientalism.* More generally speaking, the supercession of earlier terms is entirely consonant with the "aging" to which ideas and intellectual terms are subject alongside the ephemerality of production techniques, labor processes, and other tangible commodities in what Alvin Toffler once dubbed the "throwaway" society. Salman Rushdie's criticism of the epithet "commonwealth" in his 1983 essay, "Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist," might be all too easily leveled at its subsequently triumphant avatar, without threatening its eminence. Rushdie argues that the term effectively ghettoizes non-Western literature, erasing differences and selectively instating the experience of occupation by a foreign nation as the most significant criterion for forcing together disparate non-British literatures under this "new and badly made umbrella." Dismissing the notion as chimeric, Rushdie nevertheless concludes that such a creature could be conjured up "if you set up enough faculties, if you write enough books and appoint enough research students" (70). Needless to say, similar misgivings haunt postcolonial studies.[5]

A rather unexpected vintage for some of Rushdie's objections emerges if we delve into the conflicted history of American literature only a little earlier in the last century. One need only recall Nina Baym's remarks in "Melodramas of Beset Manhood" to find that the same sort of disciplinary constraints that shaped (and limited) readings of American literature when feminist literary criticism began its forceful interventions are now being replayed with contemporary inflections in the context of postcolonial literature. Baym's objection to the "going canon of major authors"—"We never read American literature directly or freely, but always through the perspective allowed by theories"—issues from a very similar dissatisfaction with the principle of suppression of those differences that cannot be accommodated by the cultural and sociopolitical preferences of prevalent critical theory (63). Baym concludes that

> in pursuit of the uniquely American, they

> [critics] have arrived at a place where Americanness has vanished into the depths of what is alleged to be the universal male psyche. The theory of American fiction has boiled down to the phrase of my title: a melodrama of beset manhood. What a reduction this is of the enormous variety of fiction written in this country, by both women and men! (79)

Ahmad's rejection of coherent theories that achieve their tenuous unity through obfuscatory and specious generalities in his response to Jameson's much publicized essay, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital," also recalls Baym's frustration at the vanishing of the multiplicity and variety of "Americanness" in the relentless quest to manufacture and hypostatize it. A similar process has more successfully occurred in the case of the postcolonial, its pluralities and sometimes productively contradictory articulations effectively managed and regularized in the process of a disciplinization based on practical considerations.

A slew of critics nevertheless continue to defend the use of the earlier terms, even if their use has waned dramatically largely because "post-colonial" is more readily acceptable to the academy for reasons that have been amply exposed by critics such as Ahmad, Brennan, Dirlik, and Shohat. For the purposes of the discussion to follow, it is important to note that the very indeterminacy of the term "postcolonial," moreover, also elegantly masks the almost invariable connotation of Third Worldliness.[6] The cry for comparative analyses, sounded so early in the career of postcolonial studies in Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge's seminal essay, "What Is Post(-)colonialism?" would have forestalled the euphemistic and obscurantist use of postcolonial thus. The case of mixed race postcolonies like Zimbabwe with a majority population in a sociopolitical minority position or that of Ireland with its contradictory experience of colonialism are only now receiving the

sustained analysis each of these cases and many others deserve. The repression of these challenges in the early stages of canon formation was variously evidenced, especially through the growing body of textbooks in the field which recognize certain experiences as paradigmatic and others as anomalous enough to preclude consideration, thereby avoiding productive debate about the nature of the paradigm itself.

Shortly after the appearance of Mishra and Hodge's important essay, the publication of the first postcolonial reader signaled the term and the field's growing institutionalization. The preface to Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman's early, and important, collection of readings in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* acknowledges the need, necessarily, "to proceed on the basis of all sorts of exclusions. . . . areas of current work such as radical geography had to be left out because of space constraints . . . sadly it seemed impossible to us both to give a sense of the debates and to do justice to the wide range of disciplinary areas where post-colonialism is an important or emergent issue" (x). The editors of this historically significant collection understood that exclusions were logistically necessary and the commitment to "Cultural Theory" a consequence both of their "institutional location and the desire to produce a collection with some degree of internal coherence" (x). These authors' candid acknowledgments nevertheless betray the power and force of disciplinarity and its attendant tyrannies. Since then, several readers, monographs, and edited collections in the field have appeared. In the past two decades, "postcolonial" has more or less overtaken all cognate usages and is being deployed as an apposite adjective for "theory," "space," and "condition," a distinction not accorded to "commonwealth" or "minority" discourse; it has also spawned other impressive neologisms, "postcoloniality" and "postcolonialism," to name but two.

As noted by numerous critics, one of the most significant reasons for the exponential expansion in postcolonial discourse was the host climate generated by the development of postmodern theory and suspicion of an objective historical consciousness (Ashcroft et al. 162). Postcolonialism thus profited enormously from its appearance alongside "the politics of poststructuralism [which] forces the recognition that all knowledge may be variously contaminated" (Young 11).[7] Although the theoretical

formulations and vocabulary of poststructuralism have functioned as an intellectual taproot for many a postcolonial critic and have played a considerable role in the status of the field, the particular milieu created in the wake of the success of postmodernism has also been significant in enabling the extraordinary receptivity accorded to postcolonialism in the late seventies and thereafter. Postcolonial articulations, construed in anticolonial terms, are obviously anterior to the rise of the field as a disciplinary reality. Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart,* for instance, appeared in 1958 and George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* in 1960; Frantz Fanon, who is considered one of the leading lights of postcolonial studies, had produced all his works by 1960. Indeed, *The Wretched of the Earth,* arguably his most influential postcolonial work, was published in 1961. The recuperation of his work in general and the renewed interest in the 1952 text *Black Skin, White Masks* in particular bespeak the status of these works as newly incarnated in the context of postmodern and psychoanalytic studies. Other earlier writers such as Aimé Césaire, C. L. R. James, Edouard Glissant, Amos Tutuola, or Rabindranath Tagore continue to be rediscovered as postcolonial in a temporally and ideologically postmodern contemporary context. If the above instantiates the operation of a contemporary frame in the reception of earlier postcolonial work, other examples might be found that attest to an allied cognitive frame that is in operation in the selection of postcolonial texts. Baym's complaint, "We never read American literature directly or freely, but always through the perspective allowed by theories," resonates for the study of most postcolonial material (63). As older texts are recuperated within a postmodern cognitive frame, contemporary critical and belletristic productions in postcolonial studies are effectively reread in the act of being read.

Continuing debates on the relationship between postcolonial and postmodern discourse rest on the unfailing persistence of a belief in *post hoc ergo propter hoc,* a formula that applies in this case with curious inflections. Arif Dirlik suggests this relationship of posteriority explicitly in his accusation that "crucial premises of postcolonial criticism, such as the repudiation of post-Enlightenment metanarratives, were enunciated first in post-structuralist thinking and the various postmodernisms it has informed" (336). Dirlik's formulation of the crucial premise of

postcolonial criticism in the language and terms familiar from the vocabulary of post-structuralism indicate his correct apprehension of the origins of the field as constructed for the First World, but it also constitutes an unwitting capitulation to the fallacy that it is most productively viewed through this selective frame. Dirlik is far from being alone in selecting for attention—and detention—a particular part of the field as it has taken shape in the last quarter of this century. Post-colonial articulations before the onset of post-structuralism and postmodernism, even on the topic of the repudiation of post-Enlightenment metanarratives are usually reworked into the framework of a field defined by a postmodern cognitive frame.

Two largely variant projects, Sara Suleri's (un)autobiographical memoir, *Meatless Days,* and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's seminal essay, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," can thus be refracted through the same lens to examine their more or less peaceful coexistence in the registers of postcolonial discourse. Suleri's disarticulation of the Third World woman and denaturalization of the category of woman, the claim, indeed, that "there are no women in the Third world," is a gesture very much in keeping with postmodern disavowal of essentialist productions of meaning (*Meatless Days* 20). Mohanty's rejection of Western feminism's treatment of women as an "already constituted, coherent group" and of Third World woman as stereotypical victim, which results in the "suppression—often violent—of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question" attempts a similar disarticulation using the strategies of scrupulously researched specific histories rather than post-structuralist textual strategies as a counter to the untenable generalizations that function to shore up extant power structures (333). In both of the important instances cited above, the project of knowledge production about other cultures is under attack, one seen as suspicious in what we might glibly call—to modify our younger students' argot slightly—"today's postmodern society."

Postcolonial credentials typically need to be renewed in the context of a more contemporary scheme that includes, apart from the domestic First World concerns emergent in an era of the financialization of the globe, the force field exerted by the theoretical movements of our time. Thus, whether we are examining contemporary articulations in post-colonial theory and

literature or earlier ones, they both seem to suffer a relationship of posteriority with regard to post-structuralism and postmodernism.[8] In their introduction to *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* Williams and Chrisman admit that "Even a few years ago, a book of this nature might well have seemed a rather strange proposition — not only because of a general lack of recognition of the importance of the field (or even a scepticism about whether such a field really existed), but also because of the apparent scarcity of texts from which one might construct such a collection. . . . this is not now the case, thanks on the one hand to a greater *awareness* and on the other to the remarkable output of people working in the post-colonial field in recent years" (ix; emphasis mine). The greater awareness they allude to codes one more instance of the discovery of native intelligence under the optimal conditions provided by contemporary Western theoretical and socioeconomic developments.

The dominance of the contemporary context in practical postcolonialism also explains why postcolonialism, primarily conceived as a discourse concerned with the impact of European colonialism on former colonies, is now being deployed in the discussion of transnational relations. Its impressive discursive vocabulary for the treatment of topics like nation, nationalism, diaspora, and hybridity lends itself, accurately if sometimes too selectively and unfortunately, to a perception of post-colonial theory as the discursive expression, indeed as the language of globalization and globalism. It is not irrelevant, of course, that postcolonialism is a discourse developed partly in response to those processes of modernization set in motion by colonialism that have morphed into the intricate and interwoven economic, social, and cultural relations of today. Given its other mandates and its history, this exclusionist understanding will not do, of course, but it is not difficult to see why this kind of postcolonial discourse captures the contemporary imagination.

More important, there are few contenders for this spot. Pursuant to the collapse of the Soviet empire and to the end of the cold war—to the end of history as Fukuyama would have it—the contemporary period has been widely designated postcommunist, creating yet another niche for postcolonialism as the remaining holdout (arguably, of course) against capitalist hegemony. In a less polemic sense, as far as the rise of post-colonial studies is

concerned, timing is everything. The changing ethnic and racial demographics of Anglo-America (already evident for some years in the United Kingdom) since 1965 and the increasing numbers and influence of immigrant communities in general, and in the academy in particular, must therefore be counted as important factors as well. The movement of postcolonial "labor," however educated or technically skilled, to the centers of capital has had an inevitable impact on the cultural scape of the First World. The increasing production and availability of texts in English by postcolonial authors and the actual presence of "postcolonials" in the West with the ability to teach and discuss those texts while exerting an influence on the educational and cultural ideoscapes in Western countries and their reinforcement by the growing numbers of minority students are related factors.[9] An assessment of the reasons for the phenomenal success of postcolonialism must also take into account the cardinal role of technological developments, particularly in the area of communications. People, ideas, and labor have traveled for centuries and entrepreneurial ventures have brought about cultural convergences at unexpected sites. The unprecedented speed and ease of transmission of ideas and transportation of people today, however, is of some significance for a field that has emerged in the information age and is defined by the terms of modernity. The technologically facilitated movement of postcolonial intellectuals in the metropolitan circuits of the world academy, the rapidly multiplying number of journals in the field, and a growing internet academic community with many more fora for the exchange and transmission of information and ideas have provided a virtually limitless audience and a well-spotlighted stage for postcolonial ideas.

The growing visibility of academicians of South Asian origin in the field of cultural criticism and the growing ranks of South Asian academicians resident in Great Britain and Anglo-America have served to consolidate the status and currency of postcolonial literature and theory considerably, although not nearly as prominently or exclusively as Dirlik seems to suggest. Dirlik's overestimation of the contribution of "Third World intellectuals"—whose arrival in "First World academe" is said to be the point at which the postcolonial "begins"—appears to willfully slight the role of significant Canadian and Australian critics such as Stephen

Slemon, Helen Tiffin, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Simon During; South African critics such as Neil Lazarus; or American critics such as Timothy Brennan. The singling out of critics of South Asian origin also constitutes an implicit dismissal of African and Caribbean intellectuals whose work is seminal to contemporary developments in postcolonial theory and is now undergoing substantial and necessary recuperation.[10] The hegemonic shape of postcolonialism nevertheless emerges in Dirlik's essay as one dominated by South Asian intellectuals, and it is one that continues to inflect the usual understanding of post-colonialism. A disavowal of plural origins in the "outline" form of the field need not imply ignorance of a more rounded apprehension of its complexities, but the rush to theory and seizure in the face of an otherwise unmanageable chaos is itself symptomatic of "the condition of the intelligentsia of global capitalism," and indeed of the condition of a new stage of spatial compression that obscures the "elsewheres" in favor of the readily graspable schematic.

That the "colonial" of "postcolonial" is more or less synonymous with European and/or Western (Atlanticist if one prefers) has interesting implications for intellectual pursuits. Even in a purely modern sense, the conflation of "colonizer" with "European" is a problematic one.[11] Without discounting the need for the discursive convenience supplied by shorthand such as "European colonialism" or "European Orientalism," customary usage is challenged by more than one conflicted case. The plot thickens, for instance, when we consider the case of Ireland, which is both European and postcolonial, a matter I will preview here in the context of this discussion but will elaborate in the next chapter. The conflict is unwittingly revealed in this telling passage from Said's *Culture and Imperialism:* "*European* writing on Africa, India, parts of the Far East, Australia, and the Caribbean . . . I see as part of the general *European* effort to rule *distant* lands and peoples and, therefore, as related to Orientalist descriptions of the Islamic world, as well as to *Europe's* special ways of representing the Caribbean islands, *Ireland,* and the Far East" (quoted in Longley 30; Longley's emphasis). The power of customary usage is such that we know what is meant. Said is clearly aware of the *idea* of Europe as a colonial power and of Ireland's status as an internal, "white colony" (*Culture and Imperialism* xv); his essay on

"Yeats and Decolonization" attests to this understanding of the complexities of the Irish experience. One assumes that Said intends a similarly "discursive" Europe (and West) rather than Europe or the West in their entirety in the following statement:

> At the margins of Western society, all the non-European regions, whose inhabitants, societies, histories, and beings represented a non-European essence, were made subservient to Europe, which in turn demonstrably continued to control what was not Europe, and represented the non-European in such a way as to sustain control. (106)

This inference might also be drawn from another passage in which Said clarifies that it would be "too simple and reductive to argue that everything in European or American culture . . . prepares for or consolidates the grand idea of empire" (80). The first two passages nonetheless betray the power of conventional usage. The ambiguities presented by *Mitteleuropa,* the very heart of Europe, an area pulsating with the contradictions of being between East and West ideologically and otherwise, offer yet another instructive comparative case that adumbrates the extent to which the idea of Europe must necessarily be forcefully imagined both by the imperial European colonizer and his others. The exception may not negate the rule, but it can be a worthwhile stopping point for a critical discourse.[12]

The general predisposition of postcolonial discourse away from the examination of such locations as Latin America and Cuba—excoriated by critics like Brennan—evolves from a somewhat arbitrary quirk in the usage of an otherwise expansive term, one that is inevitably linked to a cultural politics that continues to privilege a constructed Euro-American center of relatively recent vintage. Brett Levinson offers an alternative explanation for the

marginality of Latin America in postcolonial studies: "Latin America," he suggests, "disrupts most postcolonial discourses because it is not Western and not Other, but the third term, the border, the relation between the two" (156). Although Levinson's is a persuasive account, the relative absence of Latin America from a postcolonial map might be ascribed at least equally to the primacy of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century phases of colonialism in postcolonial studies as well as a continued, even increasing, emphasis on anglophone literature facilitated by the transnational book trade. A proper consideration of Latin American cultural and intellectual products would, of course, also entail the study of Spanish, if not Brazilian Portuguese, and the need for these languages is poorly matched against others such as French and German, despite the presence of large Hispanic populations in Anglo-America where geographical contiguity would seem to warrant an inclusion of Latin American concerns within the dominant rather than peripheral postcolonial rubric. As J. Jorge Klor de Alva notes in "Colonialism and Postcolonialism as (Latin) American Mirages," certain meanings of the term "colonial"—"dependency, control—are clearly applicable to the past and present relations between the native communities and non-Indians [in Latin America]" but "in light of today's insistence on ethnicity and race (over economics and class) as critical components of social cohesion and as determinants of socioeconomic experience, and as a result of our recently heightened awareness of the negotiated nature of ethnoracial identity, neither term [colonial or colonialism], *as commonly understood today,* seems particularly useful for making sense of the cultural processes that engendered postcontact and post-independence societies," underscoring the extent to which certain models of colonialism and postcolonialism have become normalized in the discipline (18, 3–4). The capricious selection of a particular season as the season of colonialism with a preordained cast of characters as villains and victims might be explained away on the grounds of disciplinary coherence, if not convenience—for disciplinarity almost always implies boundaries that are not always defensible.

The content of postcolonial identity is implicitly assumed to reside in the economic deprivation and disprivileging associated with Third Worldliness. The internal striation we find in the so-

called South these days continues to be invisible in the persistently macroscopic view that defines postcoloniality in metropolitan discourse. In this view, there is little room for considering the complexities wrought by contemporary technologies and the new world order and the new alignments and coalitions that complicate the notion of bipolar or even tripolar power bases. In her debut novel, *Zenzele,* J. Nozipo Maraire describes the symptoms of "the postcolonial syndrome" thus: "acquisition, imitation, and a paucity of imagination" (17). This syndrome has ensured the perpetuation of a preordained maldevelopment trajectory that maintains the dominance of a certain class and the progressive impoverishment of others. In a short story aptly titled "For Whom Things Did Not Change," Ama Ata Aidoo emphasizes the emptiness of independence as a meaningful moment in the life of an aging retainer at a government rest house that has registered a change in administration in the complexion of its visitors but not in their attitude toward the old man. Finding a sympathetic listener in an unusual visitor who responds to him as a human being rather than as a servant, Zirigu confesses his secret hope after independence: "But now we are independent," he remembers thinking, "they are going to make this house new. My own people will give me a closet and an electric light" (31). When Zirigu returns after the renovations are finished, however, this is what he finds in his quarters:

> They had put fresh paint on the walls. They had repaired the steps leading to the rooms and they had made us a little verandah. But there were no electric lights and in the lavatory, no water-closet. I discovered they had taken away the old pail and given me a new one. My own people who are big men do not think I should use these good things they use. (32)

Zirigu's question of his "young master," "what does 'Independence' mean?" echoes throughout a postcolonial world that has failed to bridge the gap between its better and its lesser endowed peoples. In his angry and scatological novelistic diatribe, Aidoo's fellow Ghanaian Ayi Kwei Armah baldly accuses the sons of the nation of producing the "same old stories of money changing hands and throats getting moistened and palms getting greased" (10). The difference is that "if the old stories aroused any anger, there was nowhere for it to go. The sons of the nation were now in charge, after all. How completely the new thing took after the old" (10). "So much time has gone by," Armah laments, "and still there is no sweetness here" (67). Aidoo's story (from a collection titled *No Sweetness Here,* published two years later, which picks up Armah's despondent phrase) is a similar plaint at the vacuity of independence as a symbol of emancipation for the majority of the people who will find that they have awaited this moment in vain. The South Asian Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz would openly declare in his "Subh-e-Azadi (August 1947)": "Ye dagh dagh ujala, ye shab-ghazida sahar / Vo intizar tha jisk-ka, ye vo sahar to nahin . . . Abhi charag-e-sar-erah ko kuch khabar hi nahin; / Abhi girani-e-shab men kami nahin ai / Chale-chalo ke vo manzil abhi nahin ai" [Freedom's Dawn (August 1947): This stained daylight, night-blighted dawn / This is not the dawn we longed for. . . The weight of night is still upon us / our mind and spirit not free from ransom set / Go on, for the goal is not yet] (*Poems by Faiz* 127; my translation).

Fanon anticipates the moment of surprise when "the people find out that the iniquitous fact of exploitation can wear a black face, or an Arab one" (145). His sober reminder that "the fact of having a national flag and the hope of an independent nation does not always tempt certain strata of the population to give up their interests or privileges," that "natives like themselves do not lose sight of the main chance, but quite on the contrary seem to make use of the war in order to strengthen their material situation and their growing power" underscores the bitterness of discovery and the loss of moral certainties that follows: "Everything seemed to be so simple before: the bad people were on one side and the good on the other" (144, 145). A great deal of postcolonial theory and literature thus enjoin upon us the need to encounter difficult realities and to turn away from uncomplicated and unquestioned

certainties. A more expansive understanding of colonialism beyond the strictures of modern European colonialism and its Northern avatars and of *internal* colonialism will follow if we are able to admit these issues within the scope of the "dominant" postcolonial problem, and not merely as anomalous or supplementary to it.[13] The expansionist and aggressive invasion of tribal lands, the displacement of millions of indigenous peoples, the persistence of illiteracy and class-determined access to jobs and education are all versions of internal annexation and abuse of indigenous resources in a manner scarcely less opprobrious than that of the colonial project that continues to command metropolitan attention to the exclusion of other concerns. The oppression of Fourth World peoples throughout the postcolonial world, the growing economic disparities, the continuing vulnerability of women, and the oppressions of bureaucratic statist machines are topics deemed worthy of a great deal of postcolonial literature in vernacular languages as well as in English. Owing to the dominance of practical formulae that focus on topics of interest in the metropole, these are not areas that have received serious consideration in a dominant paradigm that assumes that the empire can only write *back* to First World concerns.[14] The implication of pre-European societal and production models in the colonial project, as I have attempted to argue earlier, or "precolonial" colonialism and internal colonialism as relevant and related phenomena thus also remain largely unattended in practice even when they command theoretical attention. Most egregiously, moreover, the paucity of nonliterary representations of resistance seriously belittles the efforts of those who are effectively resisting transnational capitalism, maldevelopment projects, and the heavy hand of the state in the Third World when they threaten the rights and survival of less empowered groups.[15]

A dramatic symptom of inattention to these complexities is the relatively underdeveloped thread of Marxist criticism in postcolonial work, as Lazarus bemoans in *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Post-colonial World,* even as he suggests that "it has today become possible" for the "first time since the field was instituted in the early eighties" for "Marxist scholars to engage postcolonial studies on its own ground" (15). The relative relegation of Marxist doctrine to the fringes of theoretical activity thus far—barring the important interventions of Ahmad and a few

other critics—however, has prevented a meaningful reconception of the three or more or fewer worlds in terms other than the geographical.

The above discussion details one symptomatic instance of two interrelated problems, the one discursive and the other an undeniable political reality: that postcolonial discourse betrays its inability to avoid writing back to the center or passing through it in the same way that the post-colonial nation is unavoidably, and often counterproductively, tethered to its founding "parent." Obliged to resort to self-definition and a future trajectory in terms derived from the structural systems of European modernity in both cases, the "post" of postcolonial is a telling sign of the contradictions and ambiguities that attend both in the quest for "independent" articulation. A structural—rather than individual, it must be emphasized—lack of autonomy fashions the choices accessible to articulation within the "postcolonial" register. In the practical discipline, then, a wide range of definitional and terminological problems collude with a fundamental reliance on the terms set by the challenger's intelligence, leading to both under and overdeterminative claims.

A final instantiation of "postcolonial" criticism as a practical skill concludes my discussion. Among the six activities listed in Peter Barry's *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* in the section, "What Postcolonial Critics Do," is the following:

> They develop a perspective, not just applicable to postcolonial literatures, whereby states of marginality, plurality and perceived "Otherness" are seen as sources of energy and potential change. (198)

The tacit goal of social activism implied in this description is joined in the other five activities suggested by Barry with rejection of universalism, examination of colonial literature for its

representations of the other or its silences, celebration of hybridity, and the foregrounding of difference. Conspicuous by its absence from this list is the attempt to link these goals with the development of a postcolonial poetics. No less glaring is the upbeat translation of "Otherness" as a source of energy and potential change, given that any number of postcolonial literary texts might be cited as examples of an attempt to call defeat by its proper name and to recognize the increasing sway of totalizing systems. As part of the apparatus by which a discipline is consolidated, introductory texts of this nature contribute to the undue solidification of an area of study in terms that cannot fully represent the plenitude of issues and concerns that belong to it. The "description" of what postcolonial critics do, and the unsaid recommendation that alert students would do well to do the same, imperceptibly slides into a prescription for a postcolonial methodology. The containment of postcolonial literature and theory within this disciplinary structure thus operates through a process that Foucault refers to as "normalization."

It is beyond the scope and design of the current project to instantiate a redress of all the exclusions and problems addressed above. My purpose in this chapter has been to attempt a composite profile for the practical discipline of postcolonial studies. It is within this context that the texts here studied must be located in order to fathom the tacit administrations to which they are subject. Isolating a select hegemonic group of texts for examination, however, I intend to pursue an investigation of potential value and "truth-content" in the precise context of textual and sometimes even biographical compliance (real and perceived) with many of the dominant tropes associated with the practical discipline. The next chapter explores the evolution of these tropes from the process of worlding that defines (etymologically, "limits") the practical discipline of postcolonialism.

Chapter 2

Uncommon Grounds: Postcolonialism and the Irish Case

> Hindustan is an Italy of Asiatic dimensions, the Himalayas for the Alps, the Plains of Bengal for the Plains of Lombardy, the Deccan for the Apennines, and the Isle of Ceylon for the Island of Sicily. The same rich variety in the products of the soil, and the same dismemberment in the political configuration. . . . Yet, in a social point of view, Hindustan is not the Italy, but the Ireland of the East.
>
> —Karl Marx, "The British Rule in India"

> The Irish are the niggers of Europe, lads.
>
> —Roddy Doyle, *The Commitments*

The problem of the Irish case resides in its uneasy suspension between exemplarity by certain criteria and atypicality or even outright ineligibility by others. The agglomerated conception of the geopolitical constituents comprising what I uncomfortably dub the "Irish case" is open to interpretation for it is uncertain whether it is a conceptual construct, a habitus, a sentimental fiction to live and die for, a projected cultural union, or an idea whose time has come and gone as the context shifts from colonial relationships to

European unionism.[1] Complications comprise the stuff of Irish identity. If the Irish case evinces symptoms of postcoloniality at all, it is still grudgingly conceded to be only arguably, anomalously, or putatively so.[2] The grounds on which critics argue for the inclusion or exclusion of the Irish case in the postcolonial register reveals an accretion of default formulae that dominate the construction of a very selective sort of postcolonialism, one I have earlier referred to as poco postcolonialism. Such debates usually proceed, mutatis mutandis, on the presupposition that there is a real and stable postcolonial identity against which the Irish must be measured. In asking the question, "What is and is not postcolonial about the Irish case?," a covert mission should be assumed that announces another question altogether, namely, "What is postcolonial about the *postcolonial?*" Perhaps the more interesting discovery in entering this briar patch will be a deeper understanding of the unacknowledged contours of the metropolitan "postcolonial." It is the measure of what we call "postcolonial" that risks exposure when the case study itself mutates into the yardstick. The discussion to follow is powered by this unavoidable transformation.

The exclusionary trend in postcolonial frameworks can be traced back to a disciplinary moment of determinative consequence for the current debate.[3] The foundational role of *The Empire Writes Back* in the history of postcolonial studies has earlier been acknowledged. The authors of this influential text use the term "post-colonial" to "cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (Ashcroft et al. 2). Using this formula, they accord postcolonial status to such locations as India, various African countries, Canada, and Australia. Yet they deny it to Ireland even though, by their own admission, "It is possible to argue that . . . [the Irish] were among the first victims of European expansion" (Ashcroft et al. 33), and even though there is ample evidence that its resistance struggle was considered "talismanic" by leading nationalists in that paradigmatic colony, India (Boehmer 4, 114).[4] Why does the postcolonial engine, when it does not circumvent the issue, grind to an uncertain halt when it comes to Ireland? A reexamination of the reasons for excluding Ireland despite its colonial experience is long overdue, particularly now that the debate has been rekindled among Irish critics.[5] The Irish case has

the potential to issue a frontal challenge to a customary understanding of postcoloniality and to reveal assumptions that are seldom openly acknowledged. It is also likely to lay bare the practical discipline's glib reduction of the complex circumstances of colonialism to a disciplinarily intramural drama with a cast of characters comprised of usual suspects and predictable victims. These are the risks that attend the investigation undertaken here.

If we performed even a brief comparison between Ireland and India— that colony par excellence—we should find many occasions for a productive comparison. One is struck, for example, by the uncanny similarities between the language of Henry VIII's 1537 act that aimed to promote "a conformity, concordance and familiarity in language, tongue, in manners, order and apparel"[6] among the Irish and Macaulay's 1835 articulation in the famous minute on Indian education of the goals of English education: "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (249). A very similar sentiment also pervades Sir William Parsons' dictum regarding the Irish: "We must change their course of government, clothing, customs, manner of holding land, language and habit of life" (quoted in Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* 10).[7] The *mission civilisatrice* produced comparable effects—alongside admittedly differential ones—throughout the colonized world, and a comparison of Irish and subcontinental literature reveals many common themes. Historically, Indian nationalists found many occasions to compare their situation with that of the Irish. Indeed, India found "inspiration and guidance" in the example of Ireland, studying "Irish strategies of both parliamentary pressure and armed insurrection" and the formation of the Sinn Féin. To Jawaharlal Nehru, "The 1916 Easter Rising represented a model of indomitable nationalism," while Tagore confessed to sharing Yeats' ideas of "inheriting the past" (Boehmer 114). Besides, Irishwoman Annie Besant was credited "with the successful application of Irish methods of political agitation in the campaigns waged by Indian separatists" (Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* 252). The exchange, moreover, sometimes went both ways.[8] David Cairns and Shaun Richards also find useful points of comparison between the Indian and Irish nationalist sense of relations of dominance in

response to imperial projections of English masculism and the effeminacy of the colonized (49).[9] Moreover, Margaret Kelleher has pointed out the startling parallels between the Irish and the great Bengal famines, even though they occurred roughly a century apart.[10] In a more contemporary frame, the experience of the Indian partition and the ongoing communal struggles in the subcontinent also extend the opportunity for instructive comparison with the "troubles" in Northern Ireland. The perceived lacuna in the attainment of a full Irish identity offers a compelling counterpoint for those studying the movement for an *akhand Bharat* (undivided India). In a continuum into this century, the phenomenon of diaspora has had an important history for both cultures, especially with regard to the involvement of the diasporic population in homeland nationalism.[11] In the realm of literary expression too, there would seem to be important points of comparison between the Irish and other readily admitted post-colonial writers. The legacy of colonial educational policies features as an important theme in Irish and other postcolonial works. Other parallels might just as easily be mustered. In defiance of what seem to be ostensibly compelling justifications, however, the Irish case nevertheless remains an uncomfortable solecism for postcolonial studies.

At some risk of seeming slick, one might submit that the grounds for questioning the postcolonial identity of Ireland and the Irish usually boil down to some version of one or more of the following: it's the wrong place for it, they're the wrong color, the timing is all wrong, and they had or have the wrong politics. In objective terms, these would be termed the criteria of race, geography, history, ideology, and economics, the last being a category heavily informed by a curious conflation of race with geography. The discussion to follow reveals that each of these spawns more controversy than we would expect. If the application, and for some critics the *mis*application, of the epithet "postcolonial" in the Irish case reveals the extent to which it is one of anomalous postcoloniality at best, it is also instructive because it insinuates a hitherto unexamined proposition: that states of colonialism and postcolonialism, when subjected to examination along similar criteria, can be exposed as similarly complex in non-Irish contexts as well. An investigation of the Irish case, as this chapter goes on to demonstrate, uncovers the value of discrepancy

as a heuristic device in the investigation of colonialism and post-colonialism. The problem of orientation (or what Theodore Allen refers to as a "'white' habit of mind") has prevented a consideration of non-Irish cases as capable of revealing similar resistance to generic characterizations (Allen quoted in Gibbons, *Transformations* 208n18). In a resolutely comparative mode, a sober reckoning of the Irish case as discrepant begins to uncover the complex conditions of a world where power and its lack occur fractally rather than in predictable geographic or racial dichotomies, and where victimization and oppression reside in situations and contexts rather than in broad categories. It is precisely because of the alternative economy of the small scale afforded by the specific case of Ireland that we begin to perceive difference and exploitation as mobile across contexts, attaching to situations rather than to groups. Neither race, nor geography, neither Third nor First Worldliness are straightforward issues in the Irish context; nor is the thorny topic of the participation of the Irish in empire building. The resistance of the particular case of Ireland mocks the classificatory impulse that threatens to flatten the complexity of postcoloniality.

The two categorical differences that inevitably arise in discussions of the Irish case are those of race and geography.[12] In the view of some critics, the antagonism we assume between most colonies and England simply could not have existed between Ireland and England because of two powerful factors: geographical proximity and the absence of racial difference. Luke Gibbons reports that the "lack of fixed boundaries, of clear racial markers, has led some commentators to conclude that there was no rational basis for the 'ancient quarrel' between Ireland and England, and that the separatist movement was fuelled simply by the willful obsurantism of Irish nationalism" ("Race" 96). English perceptions of the Irish difference, it is argued, are difficult to translate into the vocabulary of race because of the lack of visual markers. Sheridan Gilley argues that "since an *objective criterion* of race like skin colour is lacking to define Saxon dislike for the Celts, there is a difficulty of definition in deciding at what point vague talk about Celtic character amounts to 'racial prejudice'" (quoted in Gibbons, "Race" 96; emphasis mine). If anything, Gilley contends "that English attitudes towards the Irish were distinguished by a spirit of toleration and a willingness to accommodate Irish difference"

(96).[13] Gilley's assumption that prejudice against blacks would be more natural and understandable aside, in the absence of visible difference, it has been difficult to develop a discursive set of terms comparable to those engendered to discuss the systematic discrimination associated with racism.[14] Thomas Carlyle's summary dispatching of the visibly white Irish in the comment, "black-lead them and put them over with the niggers" is one of many contradictory gestures made in the Irish context that betray the instability and arbitrariness of the racial measure, one that also affected the self-identification of the Irish in their bid to assimilate into mainstream America (quoted in Gibbons 96).[15] The troublesome ramification we are obliged to confront here is that whether or not we portray the Irish-English encounter in terms of colonialism or Europeanist state assimilation, and whether or not we assign prejudice to race or religious bigotry, being the "right" color did not prevent the Irish from being targeted as inferior or from being targeted for "development." If anything, whiteness only highlighted their difference.

What difference *under* the skin, we might now ask, allowed the Irish to be described in terms used for blacks and American Indians and yet to be categorically differentiated from them? If the Irish were not quite not white, they were nevertheless perceived as different. Even if they were compared to aborigines, Orientals, blacks, and Jews, the Irish difference, we are constantly reminded, is of a different caliber (Cheng, *Joyce*; Gibbons, "Race against Time"; Curtis). It is also, moreover, a prior difference in that Ireland was the oldest of England's "colonies." The casual transference of derogatory epithets and references from the Irish to the more colored of the colonized peoples suggest a continuity it would be impossible to disregard, even if the Irish were always seen as differently different. Kiberd reminds us in *Inventing Ireland* that "in centuries to come, English colonizers in India or Africa would impute to the 'Gunga Dins' and 'Fuzzi-Wuzzies' those same traits already attributed to the Irish" (*Inventing Ireland* 15). If this is so, it is *race* that is the latecomer in the vocabulary of colonial prejudice. A prior sense of difference would have to await the discursive mechanism of race for its systematic articulation. It is perhaps unnecessary to remind the reader that it is not until the nineteenth century that the language of race was allowed methodical discursive legitimacy through rational scientism. The

content of Irish difference, although it was only racialized in later accounts, was sufficient grounds for annexation and colonization a long time ago—even if some would insist that it was only "a colonization of sorts." The Irish case then obliges us to confront not only the difference of their difference, but it also impels us to consider that it is not the phenomenon of colonization and scalar views of peoples so much as their theoretical and discursive shape that are radically new in successive historical periods.

Viewed on a large scale, difference is only visible in the design of polar distinctions. The language of race is particularly compatible with this global view. In a close-up we would begin to see the differences that inhere in more intimate settings. What, then, was the content of Irish difference? Clair Wills argues that "despite some pseudo-Darwinian attempts to match Irish with black physiognomy, in general stereotypes of the 'wild Irish' have tended to concentrate on their habits and lifestyle (poverty, laziness, dirt and drunkenness), and . . . their *language*" (21). Not white, not quite, by certain measures but not quite not white visually, the Irish challenge glib platitudes about racial categories and binaries. If not race, although the language of race was routinely used in characterizing them, there were clearly some factors that placed the Irish on the same side of the cartographic divide as other colonized peoples even as others kept the Irish case firmly entrenched within a European and white context. The Irish case reveals the extent to which the reductive formula of race can be complicated considerably by attention to the coding of difference in various other registers: language, behavior, or visual markers unrelated to color, for instance.

The conflation of the Irish with American Indians and blacks, thoroughly discussed by numerous critics and historians, is scarcely in need of repetition here, save to observe that visible difference was only one of many criteria used in the oppression of various peoples in the colonial enterprise.[16] In "Mill and the East India Company," Trevor Lloyd observes that Mill's paralleling of Ireland and India seemed to rest on something quite other than race:

> When he wrote "What has been done for

> India, has now to be done for Ireland," it might have been expected that he would refer to changes in Irish land law, or at least in the administration of land taxes. In fact he was saying that India was fortunate to have been governed by people who lived there and did not want to turn India into something English, but simply to get rid of "mischievous practices" and take the rest of Indian society as the starting point for "further stages in improvement." This is not quite the same as Lord Salisbury's Irish policy of "twenty years of resolute government," but it does suggest that Mill felt the Irish had bad habits which they would be all the better for losing. (72)

Although "bad habits" and "mischievous practices" may not have been the only grounds for comparison used by Rudyard Kipling, he, too, is reported to have said, "By every test that I know, the Irish are Oriental" (quoted in Dunsany 47). It is by the relatively unobjective criterion, to recall Gilley's usage, of "temperament and constitution," that the Irish are rendered strange in the following account by George Templeton Strong, an American journalist. Observing a group of Irish women bemoaning the death of "a pair of ill-starred Celtic laborers" who had died during building construction, Strong notes:

> I suppose they were 'keening'; all together were raising a wild, unearthly cry, half

> shriek and half song, wailing as a score of daylight banshees, clapping their hands and gesticulating passionately. . . . It was an uncanny sound to hear, quite new to me . . . Our Celtic fellow citizens are almost as remote from us in temperament and constitution as the Chinese! (quoted in O'Connor 159)

As I will argue in the concluding sections of this chapter, perceptions of the relationship of these diverse constituencies to the evolving conditions of modernity may provide the all important key to the conflations suggested here, using an overarching criterion well beyond that of racial difference.

The following example suggests a space for the development of this argument. An Irish immigrant, writing back in 1860 from "America" confides, "If an Irishman abroad be quick, active, enterprising, disposed to labor hard, get rid as soon as possible of National peculiarities and set himself down to adopt the ways and customs of the people he is certain to succeed" (quoted in O'Connor 244). Under which rubric should we class such criteria as "national peculiarities"? The persecution of the Irish in the American context would end over time, largely as a consequence, Noel Ignatiev suggests, of their having become white, a proposition that begs the questions, What is the content of whiteness? And might nonwhites, eventually, attain to it? The honorary whiteness granted the Japanese by the South African apartheid regime suggests one instance of apparently random dispensation that we might investigate more systematically to ascertain whether our exclusive preoccupation with colorism and colonialism has blinded us to other mechanisms of oppression, exploitation, and identification we have no easy names for yet. It would be willfully naive to deny the reification of racial difference as an operative factor in past and present violence, but it is also unnecessary to aggrandize this to the exclusion of less calculable forms of difference that also demand attention, particularly in a

closer view than usually available on the postcolonial world. The operation of random and irreducible factors in a structured system such as colonialism can alert us to the importance of factors displaced by exclusivist attention to race and color.

The contention here is not that race is irrelevant to a discussion of the Irish case. As it turns out, if the racially different Irish and Africans or Indians were subjected to similar prejudices, there were nevertheless significant racial obstacles to the formation of solidarity between these peoples. Their own experience did not always prevent the Irish from exercising their putative racial superiority toward other colonized peoples. If "the Irish and Indians shared platforms across the United States" in 1919 and 1929 and many Irish nationalists thought that "British rule in India was an obstacle to the freedom of other colonial peoples" and made common cause with them, also to be found "within the tradition of Irish nationalism was a strain of white triumphalism" that discouraged many from wanting to work with the Indians (Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* 255, 259).[17] The use of race as a stable criterion in judging post-colonial candidacy, however, is highly problematic because it is likely to fail on two significant counts: first, because it privileges visible difference that is usually manifest only in a macroscopic view, preventing any experience with the intimacies of difference; and second, because the criterion of racial superiority and the prejudices attached to chromatism would disqualify not only the Irish but many other hitherto uncontested postcolonials. If the argument is that racial hierarchies were introduced by empire, then we must either excuse the Irish their prejudice toward their darker colonial cousins or indict much of the postcolonial world for succumbing to racial and chromatic hierarchies even as it struggles to overcome them.[18] Complicity, mimicry, ambivalence, *and* resistance exist together in the worlds transformed by colonization and its projects of modernity.

If a discussion of race in the Irish context presents complications, the associated allegation of complicity in empire and the question of Ireland's European identity are scarcely simple issues. It is specifically on these grounds that Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin deny the Irish a postcolonial identity:

> While it is possible to argue that these societies [Irish, Welsh, and Scottish] were the first victims of English expansion, their subsequent complicity in the British imperial enterprise makes it difficult for colonized peoples outside Britain to accept their identity as post-colonial. (33)[19]

To the complaint of wrong color and wrong place, we add wrong politics. Ashcroft et al. imply that *inside* Britain it may have been possible to argue for a postcolonial identity for Ireland, but in the necessarily macroscopic view now natural to postcolonial studies, the claim would be untenable. Dismissing the argument for a postcolonial identity for the Irish, Liam Kennedy maintains that "members of the Irish gentry and middle classes participated willingly in the administration of the imperial system world-wide. Thousands of Irish officers and soldiers manned its defences. Ireland, in effect, was a junior partner in the vast exploitative enterprise known as the British empire" (115). Kiberd also concedes the role of the Irish in empire, but not without a reference to Ireland's own beleaguered status in empire: "If many Irish suffered the economic and cultural woes of life under the imperial yoke, quite a few others happily took on the white man's burden in Africa and India" ("Modern Ireland" 97). Colonial textbooks routinely made reference to Ireland's place within the imperial enterprise. As Coolahan reports, "The *Third Reading Book* stated 'Great Britain and Ireland formed the most powerful kingdom in the world'" (85).[20]

Charges of hierarchalism and complicity in empire are rooted in a perception of Irish identity as close enough to the racial and geocultural identification of imperial England to be predictably complicit with its nefarious objectives. Indeed, Irish regiments did participate in the dirty work of empire, but it is also true that the colonial empire conscripted native armies throughout its dominions for its business in other parts of the world.

Undoubtedly, where conversion to its civilizing mission did not or could not occur, monetary considerations played a role, perhaps even a determinative role, in gaining native complicity. It was not only the Irish army that served British colonial designs, the Indian army was also used to further the imperial project in various African locations, including Ethiopia, Egypt, Sudan, and Uganda. It is possible, of course, to argue that the greater degree of Irish complicity should constitute a meaningful distinction. But a somber consideration of shades of difference creates further complexities. Insistence on a difference of degrees can certainly be used to set the Irish apart from the postcolonial fold; it could just as easily, however, be used to striate the Irish experience internally. In his critique of Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's claim that Irish complicity in the British imperial enterprise "makes it difficult for colonized peoples outside Britain to accept their identity as post-colonial" (33), Gibbons urges closer attention to distinctions among the Irish:

> This remarkable statement (which does not appear to include Ireland as one of those countries 'outside Britain') only makes sense if one identifies the Irish historically with settler colony in Ireland, the ruling Anglo-Irish interest, thus erasing in the process the entire indigenous population—a view closer, in fact, to 'Commonwealth' than post-colonial literature. This indiscriminate application of the term 'post-colonial' is indeed a recurrent feature of *The Empire Writes Back.* (*Transformations* 174)

Using the work of Hiram Morgan on the Irish contribution to

colonialism, Gibbons reminds us that in relation to India, "those Irish who received commissions and commands were from the protestant elite." This is also true of Australia where "the Catholic Irish were numerous but it was the Anglo-Irish 'imperial class' who exercised most influence'" (quoted in Gibbons, *Transformations* 207n8). Kennedy's proposition that Ireland was "a junior partner in the vast exploitative enterprise known as the British empire" is followed by the dutiful proviso that "there were of course variations within Ireland. Protestant Ireland was far more enthusiastic in the pursuit of imperial projects, Catholic Ireland's commitment being more passive" (115). Gibbons concedes that some Catholic and indigenous Irish did buy into "hegemonic forms of racism in the United States and Australia when they themselves managed to throw off the shackles of slavery or subjugation" but he insists on a proper recognition of this phenomenon as a process of identifying with "the existing supremacist ideologies, derived mainly from the same legacy of British colonialism from which they were trying to escape" (*Transformations* 174–75). If we were being scrupulously analytical, we would also consider that a great many Anglo-Irish were resistant to mainstream dominant English culture and attitudes and that there were a great many native soldiers all over the colonized world who did not scruple to raise arms against their fellow countrymen. Moreover, regardless of the actual breakdown of the Catholic/Protestant constituency among the soldiers abroad, there is also evidence that some of the Irish troops did experience a measure of empathy with the local colonized populations elsewhere.[21] In his remarks to the Friends of the Freedom of India in 1924, Republican Sean T. O'Kelly

> apologized to Indians and Egyptians for those of Irish background who had assisted in their oppression and "formed the backbone of the invading and destroying armies.". . . He also regretted the collaboration in the British administration of India by Irishmen who

> lacked the excuse of most soldiers that "what they did, they did in ignorance, not malice." Many soldiers, he conceded, had joined up as an alternative to starvation. (Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* 258)

As the above examples indicate, Ireland's relationship with other colonies was neither uniformly racist nor one of predictable solidarity, making the charge of complicity in empire far more convoluted than any simple deployment would suggest.[22]

The test of complicity, applied to other postcolonial societies, is hardly likely to turn up many winners. It was not only the colonizers and the Irish who profited from empire, but a whole network of supporters— pilloried in part in Anthony Appiah's damning description of "the comprador intelligentsia"—who found it monetarily gainful to forward its goals. Moreover, the slow spread of prejudice through the colonial educational apparatus operated not only on an intercolony basis but on an intracolonial level as well because imperial attitudes were gradually imbibed by the educated classes throughout the British empire. The consciousness of power structures and of education as the *via recta* to power created a distinct class system in many colonized societies, layered onto the extant hierarchical order. If we are to accuse the Irish of supporting the hierarchies of the British imperial system through active participation in it, we must also consider the internal hierarchies that prevail within other postcolonies that relegate to the category of savage its tribal populations on the grounds of their being "backward," that is, in a lamentably retarded relationship to the project of modernity and development. The subscription of the postcolonial elite to an imperial and now neocolonial agenda of development and progress within their own nation demonstrates a commitment to an essentially hierarchical mode of thought. It is, once again, the close-up view that will permit us to perceive the operation of a mentality we usually connect with racist imperialism in the many instances of internal colonialism within any of the numerous nations whose postcolonial identity is never challenged.

Given that the final—and definitive—criterion differentiating the Irish from the rest of the postcolonial world usually hinges on its approximation to or distance from Third Worldliness (geographical, economic, and otherwise), it is worth dwelling on the contours of the debate over Ireland's continental identity. Even critics who agree that "the 'facts' seem clear enough," that "Ireland was conquered and colonised by Britain in ways similar to those used in the colonisation of areas outside Europe" and that "over time, as elsewhere, the native population reasserted itself, and eventually dismantled the colonial order which had been imposed on it," insist that the matter is complicated by its location:

> First the colonising power was a neighbour, and its colonising project in Ireland was contemporaneous with, motivated and informed by, its own state building project. . . . Second, colonialism in Ireland became bound up with other, typically European, processes and conflicts—of religion, nationality, modernity and tradition. (Ruane 109)

Geographical proximity, actual integration within one economic unitary order in the present moment, and a shared political modality of longer standing have reinforced, over time, a sense of cohesiveness that once began with little more than a shared map name.[23] Liam Kennedy claims that

> When independence was achieved by . . . Ireland, this was no war of liberation, in a classic Third world sense. The complementary struggles of Griffith and

> Collins bore little resemblance to the mass uprisings and bloody retribution which occurred in Algeria, Cambodia, Vietnam or Mozambique. . . . the most relevant parallels are to be found in Europe. (116)

Irish experiences are seen by many critics as continuous with European history despite the occurrence of colonization in ways comparable to non-European parts of the world. Those who may not accept a long shared history nevertheless find a European context more relevant for the present than any other. Dermot Bolger claims, for instance, that "the inherent suggestion behind it [a phrase like 'postcolonial literature'] is of a society somehow obsessed with its relationship with a former colonial power—something which might certainly have been true in the pre-European Community society of a quarter of a century ago" (xiii).

At least some of the basic essence of a European identity, as far as the postcolonial measure is concerned, is its discursive and economic distance from the Third World. In an intermeshing of race with geography and economics, the "race" differential of the Irish from other postcolonials is often coded in terms of a European identity. Similarly, the criteria of race and geography sifted through the sieve of contemporary politics produces something very like an amorphous Third World quality that serves these days as the definitive shibboleth for a postcolonial assessment of the Irish case.[24] If the postcolonial is simply a polite way of saying not-white, not-Europe, as Ahmad bluntly states, it is not surprising that the provisional standards of race and geography are used consistently in assessments of Irish postcoloniality. It is also, of course, politesse for not-poor. By the criterion of Third Worldiness as a primarily economic measure, Ireland currently has little postcolonial purchase. The "wrong place" argument is reinforced by historicist views that put geographical units on a linear map of (usually economic) progress.[25] By the economic standard associated with Third Worldliness, it might be argued that Ireland becomes less and less postcolonial with every passing year. Eagleton points out, for

instance, that since 1996, Ireland is "the eleventh most competitive nation in the world" (*The Truth about the Irish* 37).

As a competitive nation, Kennedy suggests, Ireland's own recent history of protectionism against the Third World and its poor record of aid scarcely bespeak solidarity with the downtrodden: "One can't help thinking that developing countries might have wished for something more tangible from Ireland than protestations of a shared identity" (120). Far from minimizing his clear-sighted translation of such terms as "solidarity" and "shared identity" into material action, I would point out that inter-postcolony relations could generally stand to take the same test, an exercise that would inflect his proposition somewhat differently. If Ireland is not Zaire, as Denis Donoghue wryly points out, neither is India Zaire. And if Ireland's economic policies are intended to keep Third World products uncompetitive, other postcolonial countries also evince a lamentable lack of economic solidarity. The woeful dearth of regional feeling in South Asia, for instance, an area that has shared the experience of colonialism and its socioeconomic aftermath, is testament to the limitations of postcolonialism as a concept denoting common purpose and mutual consideration among the various ex-colonized.

If it were not only or mostly an economic measure, the term "Third World" could be useful as a conceptual counter to that system of rationalism and modernity we associate with the colonial project and with the capitalist subscriptions of First Worldism.[26] This now defunct connotation of "Third World" would have allowed us to explore not only imperialism within the First World but the supercession and overpowering of a whole system of values that are antithetical to those that produce an economically superior First World: maldevelopment in the name of progress, disregard for extant knowledge on the grounds that it is primitive and traditional, and the inability to deem the past as a conceptual resource for alternatives, and not simply as an earlier phase of the progressive present. Within the existing scheme of difference it has been very difficult to distinguish between a shackling primitivism and a productive engagement with "tradition" in which the past is a sign of nostalgia for a future informed by a different system of values. The Third World is not a place so much as a conceptual and creative supplement— rather than a viable alternative in the present circumstances—that

interrupts the devastating world order ushered in by modernity. The earlier discussion on the racial and continental standard in the Irish case refracted through this alternative sense of "Third World" allows us to ponder the proposition that imperialism and colonization in the modern period are characterized by a different sort of operative difference as the hallmark of their engine: contempt for the existing systems of values held by those "other" to its colonizing project and the resolute attempt to bring the world into one system of symbolic desire characterized by capitalism and its valuation of high-paced transformation, overproduction and overconsumption, and "development" or exploitation of resources, a desire, in other words, for modernity.

Insufficiently considered in dominant models of postcolonial investigation is an alternative apprehension of difference—the fact that it is the lack of desire among the colonized for certain modes of economic and social behavior that would have seemed so alien to the colonizer as much as visual and linguistic difference. A very similar phenomenon prevails in the classification of backward peoples within the boundaries of one nation like India. Fundamentally, then, it is the placement of different world areas within the projects of modernity, which include capitalism as well as "modern" knowledge and belief systems consonant with its progressive logic, that seem to define the identity of different geopolitical areas. If the "Third World" is a discursive space, then so too is the idea of "Europe," which is not so much a region of the world as it is what Dipesh Chakrabarty refers to as "an imaginary figure that remains deeply embedded in *clichéd and shorthand forms* in some everyday habits of thought" (*Provincializing Europe* 4). Powerfully and collectively imagined, it is an idea that seems able to transcend particularization as it maintains its identity in terms more discursive than merely geographical, even if there is an overlap between the two. It is possible, therefore, to be *in* the geographical space of Europe and to remain outside it by virtue of prototypically Third World relations of production and attachments to belief systems considered outmoded by the project of modernity. The criteria of race and geography alone are inadequate intellectual resources for understanding the experience of colonialism in a comparative frame. These criteria may well serve our classificatory impulses, but they cannot by themselves account for the similarities and

differences that characterize the exercise of colonial expansion in various locations through force as well as a belief in an almost morally motivated "modernizing" mission. Through the prism of modernity, the spread of capitalism and modern values in various parts of the world appears in various colors that are nevertheless refractions of a similar force in world history, allowing us to see both the continuum of the same and the discreteness of difference. Like capital, it is "the general light tingeing all other colours and modifying them in its specific quality" (Marx and Engels, *Collected Works* 43).

Not surprisingly, most references to the Third World measure in debates about Irish postcoloniality are obliged to acknowledge the rapid changes being experienced by Ireland in the age of globalization as it moves ever closer to "Europe" in its modern incarnation as the Celtic Tiger. If the primarily Protestant official identity of cities like Belfast, once described by Louis MacNeice as "A city built upon mud; / A culture built upon profit," reinforces the link between the Protestant work ethic and capitalism (perhaps at the expense of the working Protestant poor and the underprivileged Ulster Scots groups), the evolving cosmopolitan city of Dublin is no less susceptible of such a description today despite its primarily and historically Catholic identity (133). The debates over the postcolonial identity of Ireland, Northern Ireland, or indeed Field Day's more diffuse "Fifth Province" can hardly reckon adequately with contemporary realities without recourse to the terms of modernity and the logic of global capitalism. For all that the Irish case retains a sense of local color and uniqueness, its imbrication within this logic shifts the terms of discussion into the far more challenging discursive realm of a relationship to modernity than to the routine terms of a post-colonial identity based on race, geography, or even strictly historicist notions of progress alone. It is not surprising then, that in *Ireland after History,* David Lloyd argues for "a critical instance of contemporary postcoloniality" in the challenges to traditional modes of Irish nationalism thrown up by the resistance in Northern Ireland to the state's repressive techniques of surveillance and control (49). It is on these grounds that a more productive application of comparative and differential analyses can be mounted. A postcolonial framework may well prove the most hospitable to such a project, allowing for an examination of

difference within a nevertheless comparative structure.

The foregoing discussion would be nugatory as far as this project is concerned if it did not bear on the primary concern of *Native Intelligence,* which is the reception and treatment of a certain sort of elite and dominant postcolonial text. The scale of three worlds upon which the identity marker of "postcolonial" rests is not without repercussions for its curricular and pedagogic fate. In systemic terms, Irish and postcolonial literatures occupy a very different conceptual space in the metropolitan canon. Critics argue that centuries of English occupation and the substantial penetration of English culture and literary practice in Ireland on the one hand, and the impact of Irish culture and expression on the formation of English identity on the other, blur the distinction between Irish and English literature somewhat. A tangible consequence is the far greater curricular space traditionally occupied by Irish writers. Many Irish writers enjoy canonical status as part of the field of English literature, and no fewer than four Irish writers are numbered among Nobel laureates. The representation of Irish literature in the regular English canon apart, the growing number of programs in the study of Irish literature and culture signal a very different perception of its status against the toehold space granted to representative writers from a large number of Third World countries within a largely undifferentiated post-colonial category. As its preemptive descriptor implies, Irish literature is perceived as a *national* literature, whether we see this as an area-based or as a cultural or political sort of nationalism. Although this may be a disadvantage from certain perspectives—it negates other frameworks for Irish identity, based on the adjacence of Northern Ireland with Scotland, for instance—it does allow for a measure of coherence unavailable to the postcolonial. Because of its area studies approach, this model permits depth, whereas the primarily transnational model within which postcolonial studies has operated so far emphasizes breadth at the expense of the microscopic focus. Within the more manageable set available to it, it has been possible to explore more fully the diversity of expression and political positions in Irish literature. Within the national literature model, there is far greater pedagogic space for a rich and textured understanding of the issues across genres, even as there is room to stray from the formula of politics as "selling

point" in Brennan's phrase (*At Home* 41).

Although all Third World literature has been infamously described as "national allegory" by Jameson, many of the literatures considered paradigmatically postcolonial have yet to achieve the status of national literature disciplinarily in the above-mentioned sense. The notion of Indian or African literature was of course familiar to the Western academy even before the rise of postcolonial studies, but these literatures must now be reintroduced through the postcolonial register to command metropolitan attention. The unconscious irony of conflating the literatures of numerous nations spread across the second largest continent in the world under the sobriquet of "African literature" should indicate the distance these literatures must travel before they can be recognized in their specifics. The suspicion of many Irish critics, including Longley, that the term "postcolonial" simply disguises "nationalist" ambitions, obtains in a very fragmented sense, if at all, with regard to a great deal of postcolonial literature. Any advantages that might have accrued to postcolonial literatures in a framework emphasizing national rather than transnational contexts have, in fact, been prematurely squandered.[27]

The security of a canonical national literary status paradoxically liberates the Irish writer to move beyond "national" concerns and "national" genres, permitting exploration in genres and themes untethered to the nationalist obligation of telling the prototypically "Irish" story. That these deessentialized expressions, too, must be seen as Irish indicates an enviable instance of the comforts of traditional categorization that can deploy both reductiveness and capaciousness to advantage. The important place of Irish poetry in Irish literature and in the metropolitan canon offers a compelling contrast to the primacy of the novel in postcolonial studies. Whereas the one affords the creative and interpretive license available to its complex modes of representation, the other tempts prosaic and transparent interpretation, particularly in response to the historical novel.

Two significant issues emerge from the foregoing discussion. The first concerns the politics of representation in the metropolitan canon. Although it still dominates discussion, it is not the Field Day project alone that proposes a postcolonial paradigm for Irish studies. Numerous hortatory studies on the

"postcolonial" Yeats and Joyce insist upon reframing the terms of discussion about these writers. But if there is growing interest in asserting the "deservedly postcolonial" identity of writers like Joyce and Yeats, there is also consternation at the implications of such a move. The recuperation of already canonical Irish writers such as Swift, Sterne, Burke, Beckett, or Wilde for postcolonial membership signifies the double representation of writers already safely launched in the mainstream literary canon at a time when other writers from the postcolonies are still struggling for admission. The resulting resentment is not surprising, as Eagleton notes:

> When a previously dominant group begins to speak the language of cultural unity or diversity, it is understandable if their subordinates detect in this rhetoric a way of perpetuating their privileges in displaced form. (*Heathcliff* 271)

The battles over scant literary space at a time when the humanities is already under the glare of public scrutiny make the issue even more contentious. It may well be that regardless of the ability to make a case for Irish literature as postcolonial in a bid to complicate the concept, logistics and curricular politics will reinsert themselves as the ultimate arbiters.[28]

Although the perceived incursion of Irish literature into postcolonial curricular space is not an issue easily dismissed, the grounds on which Irish critics resist the postcolonial paradigm should occasion far greater disquiet. Such critics voice fears for Irish literature that ought to be remarkably instructive for practitioners of postcolonial literary criticism. In an interview with Dympna Callaghan about the *Field Day* anthology, Seamus Deane scores through a thicket of issues to the core with diamond-edged precision:

> What is this thing called Irish writing? What is this thing called Irish literature? These are the kinds of questions that are asked. Is she or he Irish because born on the island? etc. Ridiculous questions at one level, but at another level profound. *Because they are not asking whether Congreve is or is not Irish, but rather, what kind of identity formation attaches to certain kinds of writing and how are these identities recruited for certain purposes.* (41; emphasis mine)

The second issue that is particularly germane to the concerns of this study pertains to the "kind of identity formation [that] attaches to certain kinds of writing and how. . . these identities [are] recruited for certain purposes." Although Field Day writers and critics such as David Cairns, David Lloyd, Emer Nolan, Shaun Richards, and Clair Wills, inter alia, have tried to build a case for a postcolonial Irish identity, the matter has remained controversial at best. Among the prominent naysayers are critics Edna Longley and Denis Donoghue and writer Dermot Bolger. The former denounces "the one-size-fits-all zeal of most theorists" and the application of "the post-colonial pastry-cutter" (30, 31). Bolger's introduction to the 1995 *Vintage Book of Contemporary Irish Fiction* rejects the category of postcolonial literature outright, claiming that "it is simply not possible to allow a phrase like 'postcolonial literature' still to wander about like a decomposing chicken in search of its head, and to have it foisted upon the backs of younger writers" (xiii). While Longley's criticism addresses its lack of specificity, Bolger's is a rejection on the grounds of the obsolescence of the postcolonial and its irrelevance for contemporary Irish writers.[29] Both criteria deserve further investigation in the context of the more uncontroversial varieties of postcolonialism as well.

In their introduction to *Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World,* Jussawalla and Dasenbrock argue strenuously for a consideration of Ireland in a colonial context: "If the United States is the first of the 'dominions,' Ireland is surely the first of the colonies. Seven hundred years of colonization changed Ireland but never subdued it, and the rich literature of the Irish literary revival is in important respects a prototype for the explosion of writing in countries formerly colonized by the British around the world" (6). They nevertheless exclude Irish writers from their interviews because "Irish literature today is at a different moment of its historical evolution, but were one able to travel back in time, interviews with James Joyce and Flann O'Brien would have fit in perfectly with the concept of this book" (6–7). The point is not trivial, and it heralds one of various uneasy moments occasioned by the Irish case. As the moment of decolonization recedes for most postcolonial nations and the discipline of postcolonial studies continues to solidify its practices, it would be remiss to neglect Longley and Bolger's objections to the postcolonial paradigm for Irish studies on the grounds that it is inhospitable to specifics, entirely too generic, and obsolete or irrelevant for many postcolonial writers. A differentially comparative frame of analysis might accommodate these objections better if it also were able to examine the ways in which evolving historical forces have shifted the terms of discussion into the less commensurable arena of global modernity.

In a piece with the telling title, "Fears for Irish Studies in an Age of Identity Politics," Denis Donoghue bluntly asserts that "not only is the postcolonial approach ill-suited to the Irish situation, it sacrifices literary understanding on the altar of politics" (B4). Within a postcolonial frame still defined by the colonial moment, it is not surprising that colonial experience is centralized, and difference is conceived of in a macroscopic structure that discourages the disclosure of specifics. Thus fastened, it is very difficult to allow for range and distance from this context; thus fixed, the postcolonial remains predictable, except as the center itself moves and changes. Donoghue argues that "the interpretations of literature that it [postcolonial theory] produces are shallow and one-dimensional. Literary criticism cannot be reduced to political interpretation." The implied poverty of the postcolonial approach as critical apparatus, according to

Donoghue, rests in its hostility to "aesthetic recognition." Donoghue may be accused of painting a complex series of critical maneuvers in deceptively broad strokes, but the criticism obtains for a great deal of the readings of postcolonial literature.

When Jahan Ramazani attempts to answer the question, "Is Yeats a Postcolonial Poet?" he begins by suggesting that sponsors for Yeats's membership to the postcolonial club "would start by placing Yeats in the first nation to emerge from British colonial rule in the twentieth century." He goes on to suggest that Yeats's resistance to British cultural domination would also feature in the list of his qualifications as well the fact that his poetry could be seen as "similarly preoccupied with issues of hybridity, subaltern identity, and national formation" (64). Others "would bar the canonical poet," he argues, "on account of his Eurocentrism, his whiteness, and his affiliation with the centuries-old settler community of Anglo-Irish Protestants" (64). In concluding an illuminating discussion in response to the question, Ramazani argues that "though white and canonical, though non-third-world and Anglo-Irish, Yeats has at least enough in common with the present members to make for some animated conversation" (89). In order to reach this conclusion Ramazani concedes that "the conceit of a postcolonial club. . . . implies a consensus and stability that need to be qualified" (65).

Although postcolonial theory is marked by an unusual degree of self-awareness and continuous self-invigilation, the favored subject of literary criticism has nevertheless come to be stabilized, as Ramazani's observations suggest, through a series of disciplinary moves themselves enmeshed in the politics of the real world in which disciplines exist. The default and often unstated assumptions that emerge in the attempt to define postcoloniality are not without consequence for the manner in which postcolonial literature is read, taught, and interpreted. The foregoing discussion on postcolonialism and the Irish case reveals the general contours of the "kind of identity formation" that attaches to postcolonial literature. The aesthetic nonrecognition of the value of postcolonial literature prevails as the unfortunate residue of the self-reinforcing mechanisms of dominant critical practice.

In a Gramscian scheme, Lloyd reminds us, "a given conceptual model gains in complexity according to the levels of specificity with which it is applied" (*Anomalous States* 9). If the arguments for

exclusion of Irish studies from it reveals the shape of the dominant paradigm, the characteristic complexity of the Irish case holds valuable lessons for a post-colonial criticism that seeks to reinvest the postcolonial with a fuller understanding of its morphogenic intricacy. The pathology of nominalism surrenders the object to general categories and unity "as a rationalization of [the] failure to understand [the] facts from within" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 83). The intimacies of difference suggest that the "globalization" of postcolonial literature must also nonetheless be revalenced as an "internal" affair, both contextually and aesthetically. Alongside the theoretical reevaluation of the ossifying bones of postcolonial identity, attention to the aesthetic component of literary representation, *Native Intelligence* submits, provides an important avenue for reinvesting the singular literary text with the capacity to challenge the phantasm of generic formulae even as it seems to cleave to them.

Hercules and Antaeus

In the final section of this chapter, I will attempt to introduce, in cameo form and through a reading of two short poems by Seamus Heaney, the dilemma of the postcolonial critic who looks to assemble an organon responsive to the historic and aesthetic dimensions of literature. As already explained in the introduction, this cameo reading is also intended to highlight considerations of genre that have a significant impact on the reading and reception of postcolonial literature. The reasons for the relative neglect of poetry and drama in non-Irish postcolonial literature have been briefly broached in the previous chapter. This next segment returns to this very topic as the silent preface to the challenges posed for the postcolonial novel. In distinguishing poetry from the modalities of prose, Susan Wolfson has argued in *Formal Charges* that poetry is "precisely, and inescapably, defined by its formed language and its formal commitments" (3). Without denying that poetry has specific characteristics and has traditionally been more inviting of considerations of form, however, I will argue in my readings of postcolonial novels in the final three chapters that the narrative modes that dominate canonical post-colonial literature are no less defined by their aesthetic dimension. Indeed, it is

particularly important that this consideration be extended to literary expression in this genre because of the implicit understanding of prose as "compositorial" rather than "compositional" and of form in prose as "instrumental" rather than as a part of the signifying design (Christopher Ricks, quoted in Wolfson 236n4). Although the challenge is magnified by the variant mode of telling, the centrality of aesthetics obtains in postcolonial literary prose even as it determines our modes of apprehending poetry. Exclusive attention to the postcolonial novel either as a form predisposed to national allegory or as a purely symptomatic formal societal product of the prevailing relations of production delegitimizes both the validity of postcolonial experience as expressed in poetry and drama as well as the postcolonial novel's escape from the burdens of this "modern" form through devices it shares with these genres. In the current critical moment, however, neither has escaped the pressure to perform in instrumentally political ways.

In his poem "Hercules and Antaeus" *(North),* Heaney dramatizes the conflict between the mythical, "Sky-born and royal" Hercules, and "the mould-hugger," Antaeus.[30] In Heaney's rendition, the "challenger's intelligence" is a "blue prong" that lifts Antaeus "out of his element" and "into a dream of loss." The poem and the conflict described therein end in two counterposed images: Hercules lifting his arms "in a remorseless V" and Antaeus lifted and banked "high as a profiled ridge, / a sleeping giant, / pap for the dispossessed" (46–47). Along with other companion pieces in the collection, this poem has been read by some critics as a political allegory for postcolonial troubles in general, and Northern troubles in particular, the available commentary veering between regard for "fidelity to the processes and experiences of poetry," to use Heaney's own words, and frustration at the failure to build a meaningful bridge between poetry and politics as a result of the abstraction of immediate political contexts (*Preoccupations* 56). The competing imperatives of poetry and politics bedevil the critic even as they render ambiguous the poet's and the poems' purpose. The complexities of Heaney's difficult hermeneutic endeavor—the attempt to grasp his own bequest of dualities as much as the intricacies of colonial experience, to do his own work as much as that of understanding Irish identity, to reconcile poetics to politics, and perhaps to move toward and be

moved by an objective as yet unknown—join with the dilemma of the literary critic charged with marshaling a criticism responsive to that of the postcolonial writer essaying matters of history with the matter of art.

David Lloyd draws attention in *Anomalous States* to Heaney's stature as a poet and the coincident "tendency to regard his work as articulating important intuitions of Irish identity" (13). Composed as they were by a Northern Irish poet in the seventies, "after the renewed outbreak of political conflict," as Helen Vendler notes, the Hercules and Antaeus poems are historically rooted in the context of a troublesome phase in the political life of Northern Ireland. In his introduction to the context for *North,* Blake Morrison writes: "In the early 1970s, in a new version of the old cry, 'Where are the war poets?,' critics and journalists had begun to call for poetry that would 'deal with' Troubles" (55). As the "best-known of the Belfast 'Group,'" Heaney "was particularly subject to such exhortations. Thus when *North* finally appeared in 1975, containing some poems explicitly about the Troubles, there was an almost audible sigh of relief" (56). Clearly, much was expected of the poet and the collection.

But if the images in the Hercules and Antaeus poems evoke colonization or Northern "troubles," they do so obliquely at best. The poems cast these troubles in a drama that removes us to different places and earlier times, and their protagonists into other and confusing roles. If we were intent on a postcolonial parable—it is by no means clear that this is what Heaney himself is offering or if this is the poem's only purpose—"Hercules and Antaeus" appears to offer a powerful mythography of the colonial encounter in which the native would seem to have been thoroughly defeated by "the challenger's intelligence." The overt references to historical figures (Byrthnoth and Sitting Bull) alongside references to mythical ones and to real places ("sleeping giant," a well-known topographical feature in Northern Ireland) alongside conceptual ones (sky and earth) evoke particular contexts for this old story, but an abstract sort of native is invoked here, born and tied to the land and its fecund if defeated possibilities. In this extended elegy, Heaney collapses time and place, geography and history, text and variant contexts, and what he elsewhere refers to as a blending of "atrocities past and present" into an overwhelming (and timeless) schema of challenge and defeat (*Preoccupations* 57). Those who

long awaited a poet of the troubles find that within the logic of this particular poem from the collection, however, colonial, postcolonial, and even Irish experiences have been recessed into a much older story, and one with a known plot. Clearly, Heaney's response to the Northern troubles is to seek other troubles through the course of history. The immediacy of contemporary issues has been worked *out* of the poem in the process of straining them through a cribriform mythical structure that permits them to leak away. What is left behind is what was already there, an abiding, indeed archetypal, and already known myth now sodden with suggestion but lacking precise shape, and therefore both frustrating and rich for interpretation in its ambiguity.

"'Hercules and Antaeus,'" Heaney explains to Seamus Deane, "traces a contest in which rational light finally conquers and illuminates the dark instinctual outlook of the tribe" (Hart 77). This is a story not for the moment or the hour, but for all time. Henry Hart explains that the poem

> expresses solidarity with the dispossessed and damned; with Balor, the one-eyed robber god defeated by the legendary invaders of Ireland (the Tuath de Danaan); with Byrthnoth, leader at the Battle of Maldon whose forces were massacred by the Danes; with Sitting Bull, emblem of the American Indians doomed by white colonizers; and ultimately with Catholic inhabitants of Ireland deracinated by Protestant conquerors. (97)

Beyond this expression of solidarity, however, Heaney is also interested in presenting the story of challenge and defeat as an old story, as the *oldest* story, in fact. The particular context of the

more contemporary colonial and postcolonial experiences is both excessive and subordinate to this story. Surveying a series of events, Heaney seems to insert the reader into history even as he ultimately ejects us out of it, capitulating to some greater demand. The work of political probing is thus performed here not through a sui generis model arising from the context but through a return to stock figures from a traditional poetics that are revised, reconstituted, and pressed into service for a whole range of contexts. The poem submits a particular phenomenon, one rehearsed repeatedly through history in successive scenes of challenge and defeat, as a mythical grid through which the Irish situation might be read. Beyond the teleological structural plot of challenge and defeat, there is little but "pap for the dispossessed," in the poet's own ironically apt phrase. It is precisely this move and the recourse to myth that have garnered him much criticism from critics of the collection in which the Hercules and Antaeus poems appear.

Ciarán Carson and David Lloyd have both objected to the "dangerous conflation of myth and history" in *North* (Murphy 49). In his review of the collection in the *Honest Ulsterman,* Carson complains:

> It is as if he is saying, suffering like this is natural; these things have always happened; they happened then, they happen now, and that is sufficient ground for understanding and absolution. It is as if there never were and never will be any political consequences of such acts; they have been removed to the realm of sex, death and inevitability. (quoted in Murphy 49)

The poems, simply put, are unequal to the political task at hand.

Lodged in this incommensurability, however, is the stuff of the poetic. It is the mismatch that allows the poetic any capacity it might have for transcending the *Lebenswelt*. The abundance of the poetic imagination exceeds the worldly purpose, freeing the text from a transparent auctorial intention.[31] The liberation of the text for interpretation beyond its pragmatic context constitutes some of what we have come to recognize as the ideological power of literature. It is precisely the process of mutation between genres that renders the literary project excessive to the factual record. If this genre-dependent liberty constitutes political evasion, even ideological capitulation, it is also the freedom essential to creating possibilities that evade the conditions of the given world. Even the ideologically failed text affords insights excessive to its conservatism by virtue of this incommensurability.

Critics suggest that the Hercules and Antaeus poems can be read "as both artistic and political allegories" and that there is as much reason for reading their conflict "as a political allegory" (Morrison 58) as there is for reading it "as an oblique comment on Heaney's practice as a poet" (Shapiro 19).[32] Substantiating these somewhat psychobiographic interpretations, Richard Kearney also contends that Heaney "draws from classical myth to exemplify the struggle in his own psyche between the god of reason (Hercules) and the god of ancestral memory (Antaeus)" (130). Heaney himself reveals that "Hercules represents the balanced rational light while Antaeus represents the pieties of illiterate fidelity. The poem drifts toward an assent to Hercules, though there was a sort of nostalgia for Antaeus. . . . This was a see-saw, an advance-retire situation" ("Unhappy" 68). In the essay "Belfast," Heaney writes: "The feminine element of me involves the matter of Ireland, and the masculine strain is drawn from the involvement with English literature. . . . I was symbolically placed between the marks of English influence and the lure of the native experience, between 'the demesne' and 'the bogs.'" (quoted in Shapiro 17). The logic of the poem, moreover, suggests that the struggle is not only between historical figures but allegorical and psychological elements as well. These elements are at once external to the poet and intrinsic to his own psyche. If Hercules stands for architectonic (and avaricious) intelligence, Antaeus embodies instinct and artesian mystery; if Hercules's is the "future hung with trophies," Antaeus, a potentially representative figure for those on the losing side of

the colonial experience, is left with little more than "a dream of loss."[33]

The poet's move to allegorize—literally to speak or interpret one experience in terms of another—begins to engender a predictable set of constructions defined by the mythical scheme even as Heaney battles for a meaningful rapprochement of the competing elements warring within his own psyche for regiment, elements that are reduced to dualities in the attempt to schematize the struggle. The challenger and the native seem to have become here the "diamond absolutes," a notion Heaney rejects forcefully elsewhere in the collection. In structural and formal terms, therefore, it is not surprising that the phenomena of encounter and battle, historic *or* personal, are reflected in antagonistic representations. The Hercules-Antaeus combat is thus mirrored in linguistically opposed constructions that give structural poetic form to the confrontation of conceptual dualities. Reflecting the sexed traits associated with the challenger defeated,"Hercules and Antaeus" is constructed, as Alan Shapiro points out, on the basis of a formal tension between vowels and consonants, identified with Antaeus and Hercules respectively. If Hercules is "snake-choker,""dung-heaver,""spur of light,""blue prong," Antaeus is associated with the softer vowels and assonances, "cradling dark," "secret gullies."

Insistently preserving the dualities of male/female, instinct/intellect, tradition/technology, and pastism/futurism, the poem seems to signal total entrapment in a scheme that disallows nuance and enforces assent to the systemic world of Hercules. Hercules apparently "has the measure / of resistance," and one assumes the full measure of the "overendowed navvy," in Burris's evocative description of Antaeus (97). Notwithstanding that Heaney substitutes a state of coma for Antaeus's death in the original myth, the prospect of his reawakening is powerfully belied. As a figure for the vanquished, Antaeus leaves no palpable moraine, only "pap for the dispossessed." If Antaeus survives at all, it is as Herculean postscript, present only, and thus only *relatively,* as irrecoverable past. Their future already horoscoped by history, Antaeus is thus consigned to categorical identification with a defeated native experience while Hercules serves as the (forever) triumphant masculine strain.[34] Visible only in light of the challenger's light, the native is invisible in his own element and by

his own lights:

> But now he [Antaeus] is raised up—
> the challenger's intelligence
>
> is a spur of light.
> a blue prong graiping him
> out of his element
> into a dream of loss

Within the mythical scheme available, Antaeus has no existence except in relation to Hercules. If he existed before, it was only in anticipation of Hercules's definitive challenge. In an earlier eponymous poem ("Antaeus") in the collection, Antaeus confesses, in a feminine mode: "When I lie on the ground / I rise flushed as a rose in the morning." The feminine air of expectation is complemented with a combination of bravado and dread in the lines that conclude "Antaeus":

> Let each new hero come
> Seeking the golden apples and Atlas.
> He must wrestle with me before he pass
> Into that realm of fame
>
> Among sky-born and royal:
> He may throw me and renew my birth
> But let him not plan, lifting me off the
> earth,
> My elevation, my fall.

Threading together their twinned fate, “Hercules and Antaeus” begins thus: “Sky-born and royal / . . . Hercules has the measure / of resistance.” The poet’s return to the phrase “Sky-born and royal” forges a shackling link between the two poems. “But now,” the poem continues, “he [Antaeus] is raised up.” We understand that Antaeus falls by this rise because we are meant to recall the fear expressed in the earlier poem: “But let him not plan, lifting me off the earth / My elevation, my fall.” But we are also meant to recognize this as a *felix elevatio* that will bring the native into an inevitable and therefore inevitably progressive order. Hence the poet’s apparent assent, even capitulation, albeit reluctant. In their interpretation of the poem, David Cairns and Shaun Richards argue that “the objective is to create an act of union between Antaeus and Hercules in which the historical inevitability which sides with the latter can be enriched by ‘instinctive feel’ and ‘illiterate pleasure’” (145). Assuming that such a union is desirable or even possible, it is nevertheless clear that the *terms* of the union will remain the challenger’s, and the junction between the two will be forever marked by the inversality of the constitutive elements.[35] Antaeus has no present and no future, Hercules no relevant past.

It would seem, then, that the triumph of Hercules is quite complete. If Hercules is associated with the future and Antaeus with the past, the past is thereby lost. The inevitability of the outcome is signaled plurally through the device of a known story, through the recourse to eclipsed moments in history, and through the very structure that preordains the end. Inasmuch as these events have already happened and cannot be changed, poetic intervention cannot alter their course. The end of the poem is predetermined by the defeat of Antaeus and his tragic elevation. This loss is already the undeniable donnée.

Despite this given scheme of challenge and loss, reflected in the strictly dualist structure of the poem, a parallel move within the text escapes this rigidity altogether by collapsing time and space in two short lines that seem at first glance to be little more than an aside: “Balor will die / and Byrthnoth and Sitting Bull” (46). The insistent “Bs” in the heroic names, following in sequence from “A”ntaeus suggest the beginning of a litany that terminates prematurely, but not before it has suggested a larger and uncontainable history and the subordination of this history to

linguistic order. Figures and events from different traditions and historical periods are crossbred within one poetic string, the "Ba," "By," "Bu" variation in repetition serving almost as incantatory enunciation, or even a grammar of violence. With these two lines, the poem opens the floodgates of epic memory, commemorating the losers this time and all those ways of being and knowing that have supposedly long surrendered to their challengers. The poet refuses to let the past lie "slumbering in forgotten crates" even if their content is supposedly and inevitably known (*North* 17–18). His own well-known penchant for "digging" surfaces repeatedly throughout this and other collections of his poetry in images of excavation and unearthing as in the lifting of "the lid of the peat" and of "the coffins of dead relations," of "unwrap[ping] skins" (4, 6, 24). As he excavates "the cud of memory" the poet is intensely aware of walking over "the skull-capped ground" (8, 16). He will "revive the clay" and re-animate it for the present (18). An artful voyeur strolling through the past, the poet is a disengaged flaneur through time who will collect its fragments for the reader and reconvene their memories. It is death itself that is disallowed here even as it is recounted. Inasmuch as this is an unaccepted death it then becomes a powerful mode of reliving the past through remembrance:

> We do not fall like autumn leaves
> To sleep in peace. Some traitor breath
>
> Revives our clay. . . . (18)

In associating Antaeus with ancestral memory, moreover, the poet's account of this overwhelming defeat nevertheless constitutes that remembrance of things past that will not accept their inherent pastness. Whether or not we accept that "to recall the past is a political act," as Geoffrey Hartmann suggests, as a poetic act it effects a simultaneous affirmation of the terrors of the past even as it denies the ultimate terror of the final death we know as disremembrance (78). In his essay "The Storyteller," Benjamin accords to memory the status of "epic faculty *par*

excellence" (*Illuminations* 97). With the eclipse of those modes of telling that were designed to pass on the past and keep it alive through transmission and contact, it is a willful act of remembrance, however imperfect, that must be mobilized. If it is not given to us at the end of a horrifying course of events in history, Benjamin laments, to be able "to exchange experiences" and therefore to remain conscious of history without the faculty of this whole memory that can "absorb the course of events," imperfect recall and partial vision must now be our diminished legacy (83, 97). Within a Benjaminian scheme, as proposed in various essays in *Illuminations* in general and his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in particular, the misfitting parceled fragments we are given by the contemporary poet-storyteller do not constitute a new or alternate history with another teleology nor a hidden subversive text but rather a refusal to surrender the past to the hegemony of the *nunc stans* even as they become newly relevant to it. The oldest story in the world is thereby sundered as moments of rupture, of paroxysms and crises flash up to reconfigure the present, denying to history its fantastic creed of progress and to the future the promise of ongoing evolution. Indeed, Heaney structures his presentation of these moments as if they were haphazardly illuminated by random bolts of lightning: "Balor will die / And Brythnoth and Sitting Bull." The prophetic tone used by the poet who can logically be no more than a belated witness is accomplished by wrenching the past linguistically into the future tense. Memory thus makes the already past immediate, but it also fills us with foreboding for a future we know to have already come to pass. This overwhelming compression of time, effected through poetic and linguistic devices, becomes extremely suggestive as a potent reminder of a danger not yet past. As Benjamin declares, "the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight" (Thesis VIII, 259). In his dreadful recounting of "atrocities past and present," Heaney ultimately gives us a catalog and a chronicle of things past, not a narrative of forward movement. It is what Benjamin refers to in "The Storyteller" as the embedding of definite events "in the great inscrutable course of the world" (96). It is not the concatenation of events with which the poet is concerned but with moments of misprision and loss in the course of history. If this is no more than

aesthetic resolution, it is also no less than a seizing of the past for an as yet unknown future, thus articulating a poetic space of irresolution enacted precisely by that modal mistranslation between the political and the poetic that would normally disallow the conjunction of random fragments of history.

If the above implies the potential for poetic transformation and excess, the formal structure of the poem with its counterposed binaries and stylized antagonists embed the story squarely within a predetermined and inescapable interpretive plan. The native, by definition, must be constructed in the language of origin and loss. If the native has a contemporary dimension at all, it is in terms of capitulation to the challenger's regime of intelligibility; he is already transformed by the Herculean "spur of light."[36] The figures of Hercules and Antaeus might be seen as exemplary for the inevitability that characterizes the representation of the colonial and the postcolonial in the script derived from First World critical apparatuses. When the challenger's eye thus seeks out the native, it finds defeat and loss, as new light is shed, but on the old dark. The implied disavowal of an *other* intelligence in this formulation functions as an exquisite cartouche within a bigger picture: in the larger field of inquiry known as postcolonial studies, it is the passe-partout into the interpretation of the expressions and experiences of the native. Against the challenger's intelligence stands the nostalgic native, the mould-hugger now uprooted from place, a tragic figure who is without, it would seem, the intelligence or perception, or choice (the Latin "intelligere" also implies "to choose") enjoyed by the challenger. Disregarding, for the nonce, the fact that there are no real women in this scenario who might proliferate the difference internal to Antaeus's world, in the argument as presented, if the *value* of native experience is its feminine, instinctual contribution to male rationality, the latter is supposedly still the absolute value since its triumph is so complete.[37] This story, as it exists in a powerful archive, concedes neither instinct to Hercules nor intelligence to Antaeus, but Heaney's own acts of reconciliation suggest that the struggle continues somewhere, in the arena perhaps of aesthetic form or in a cognitive struggle that attempts to harmonize two sorts of order in an unequal battle. The attempt to fashion an admittedly muddy allegory of the defeated native and the conquering challenger result in their construction in sharply

antithetical terms, but with the sense of battle alive.

Heaney's struggle to broach the experience of colonialism and its legacy in the Antaeus poems is particularly resonant for the postcolonial project because it expresses so eloquently the traps that await the writer and the critic in their attempt to comprehend the political through the poetic within this predetermined schematic. The plenitude of the present remains undisclosed in the "cradling dark" and "secret gullies" that were the haunts of Antaeus. In the available blueprint, the only permitted space of difference stands between Hercules and Antaeus as both history and intercultural contact are simplified in the rediscovery of the native. The intimacies of difference, the brooding battles within the world of Antaeus, the challenges to which Hercules is subject in his own world, have no voice within this schematic. Is this poetic scheme a measure of bourgeois capitulation on Heaney's part or a faithful rendition of inescapable realities? Whether the poet has found this script or generated it for the task at hand, whether he speaks in propria persona or as *ventriloquus,* whether he mythologizes history or historicizes myth, whether he reduces the potential of Antaeus to "pap" or laments that it is thus reduced, whether he naturalizes violence through long memory or refuses the scopic blinders of the present, whether he flattens experience into mythical monotone or exhumes a synecdochic chorus, whether he thus evades history or is forever haunted by it, this is the thicket of questions that await the figure Joshua Glenn cheekily terms the "hermenaut" entering the deep and alien poetic space that can still remind one of home.

Chapter 3

The Aesthetic Dimension of Representation

> For borrow we certainly must if we are to elude the constraints of our immediate intellectual environment. Theory we certainly need. . . . What we also need over and above theory, however, is the critical recognition that there is no theory capable of covering, closing off, predicting all the situations in which it might be useful.
>
> —Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*

Critical Theory in the Present

Aesthetics has featured as a prominent topic in the history of German thought. In the twentieth century, scholars associated with the Frankfurt School of Marxist Aesthetics have generated analytical categories and concepts that are of particular value in at least two of the present contexts in literary studies: as the debate on aesthetics and politics is reanimated in academic circles and as emergent literatures prompt a reconsideration of the terms of modernity. In responding to political and economic developments with the potential for unprecedented impact on a global scale, Frankfurt School critics offered bold and intriguing interpretations of Marxist theory. Their effort to develop a critical theory of social life was founded in a fundamental commitment to "freedom without exploitation," to use Marcuse's phrase, and an exploration

of what *could* be alongside what is (*An Essay on Liberation* 17). Even though their ideas can hardly be said to have formed a unity, in the writings of Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Herbert Marcuse, aesthetics came to assume a particular significance.[1] In setting their sights on the role of art in an era of commodification, Adorno, Marcuse, and Benjamin, the latter considered to be in the outer circle of the institute, are the figures most closely associated with the development of a philosophical aesthetics.[2] Marxist critics such as Lucien Goldmann and Georg Lukács, whose initial challenges to Marxist orthodoxies were of signal importance to Frankfurt School Critical Theory, provide an obvious vintage for a debate on art and social reality. This study, however, focuses on theoretical positions that evince particular consideration of the formal aspects of art, and of art as an arena for utopian thinking, positions that were developed by Critical Theory in part in conversation with Lukácsian theories of reification *(Verdinglichung)* and critical realism, and in part in opposition to them.[3]

Frankfurt School Critical Theory, however, is a conflicted choice for a project that seeks to propose new directions in the reading of postcolonial literature. A Critical Theory based on the work of Adorno, Benjamin, and Marcuse is plurisonant, difficult, and unyielding of an easily recoverable aesthetic criteria. The attempt to cull a flexible glossary from their theories may incorrectly suggest the existence of these terms as readily portable. The work of Adorno and Benjamin, in fact, is notoriously difficult, variously interpreted, and hotly debated, and Marcuse's *The Aesthetic Dimension* offers a dauntingly complex negotiation between Marxist aesthetics, realism, formalism, psychology, and utopian negation, with none of these ideas being susceptible to reductive formulae.

Their internal dissension raises further problems as the terms of their own criticism of each other threaten to overdetermine our responses to the original work by forcing us to take sides. The disagreements between these theorists do serve on occasion to clarify the other's positions—as is sometimes the case in the Adorno–Benjamin dispute—but more commonly they serve to obfuscate the issues further because they were not always responding to the whole compendium of works now available to us, nor were they always operating within the same time frame. Benjamin committed suicide in 1940, Adorno died of a heart

attack in 1969 before the completion of *Aesthetic Theory,* and Marcuse survived him by ten years on a different continent, completing *The Aesthetic Dimension* in 1978 shortly before his death. Their divergent career trajectories and experiences were not without consequence for the development of their theoretical positions. Nor did their shared affinity with the primary concerns of the Frankfurt School preclude violent disagreement and interpersonal intellectual conflicts.

Besides, although all these thinkers share the problem of intransigence in variant degrees, each of the theorists under consideration also offers unique problems: Adorno because of the difficulty in recovering a coherent "theory" from *Aesthetic Theory*[4] or his other texts; Benjamin because of his expansively allusive breadth, inscrutable mysticism, constellational writing style, and elusive approaches to aesthetics; Marcuse because of his lapses into instrumentalism in theorizing aesthetics and his multiple positions on memory. The heresy of paraphrase takes on new meaning in the interpretation of Adorno as well as Benjamin, for both of whom the content of ideas was inextricable from the form of presentation. Benjamin actively cultivated ambivalence as an organizing principle, the "montage of opposites" serving to leave us with options rather than resolution, a symptom of the very crisis that the growth of global capitalism and mechanical reproduction were perpetrating. The paratactic style employed by both becomes, on occasion, an integral component of the philosophical subscription to nonhierarchical progression of ideas.[5] The inevitable urge to paraphrase their complex ideas must necessarily be bridled by the premium these thinkers placed on style as an integral component of meaning.[6] The extraction of quotations and ideas from the writings of these thinkers constitutes a species of domestication often rudely at odds with the philosophical underpinnings of their complex efforts. Moreover, what Said refers to as "a point of origin . . . a set of initial circumstances" of a theory or set of ideas cannot be summarily discounted in subsequent uses (*The World, the Text, and the Critic* 226–27).

Adorno, Benjamin, and Marcuse's own readings of literature offer a critique deeply situated in particular historical contexts no longer available to us for simple comparison with the particular circumstances in which postcolonial literature is being written and

interpreted. When they undertake an analysis of literary texts, Adorno and Benjamin focus on nineteenth-century and Modernist texts and aesthetics. To the extent, therefore, that these critics operate within a largely European frame of reference, the relevance of their ideas within a postcolonial context is not only unlikely to be readily apparent from their diverse views, it is likely to seem audacious.

Finally, one might ask, why invoke the very theorists most closely associated with the view that art was losing or had lost its critical capacity to question social norms and the economic institutions that were facilitating its production and influencing its form and content? All three thinkers bemoaned the decline in the negative function of art and remarked on the attenuation of autonomy in the world of commodity production. In his introductory essay on Benjamin in *A Companion to Aesthetics,* Donougho suggests that Benjamin "claimed, in effect, that art is at an end" (53). Benjamin's pronouncements on the end of autonomous art would seem to have sounded its death knell quite definitively, as in the statement, "when the age of mechanical reproduction separated art from its basis in cult, the semblance of its autonomy disappeared forever" (*Illuminations* 226). In a summative characterization of the Frankfurt School position on the subject, autonomous art was indeed either in its terminal phase or threatened as never before.

Marcuse's persistent belief that art is still the last refuge available in one-dimensional society and his publication of *The Aesthetic Dimension* in 1978—in which he makes his proclamations for the revolutionary potential of art despite his acute understanding of the extent to which artistic autonomy is increasingly obscured by late capitalism—are somewhat anomalous temporally and intellectually with the predominant tenor of the positions taken by the other two theorists. Although Marcuse's discussion in *The Aesthetic Dimension* focuses on the literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, he envisions the category of "authentic" art as revolutionary, not only on the grounds of "a radical change in style and technique," or in the sense of its being "written for the working class or for the 'revolution,'" but for being "subversive of perception and understanding, an indictment of the established reality, the appearance of the image of liberation," a potential that can hardly

be confined to one era or one set of cultural texts (x–xii). In describing autonomy in these terms, Marcuse was also affirming his belief, one far more optimistic than either Adorno or Benjamin would have so frankly allowed, that "the horizon of history is still open" (73).

In general terms, the ideas of Adorno and Benjamin with regard to artistic autonomy and freedom are far more closely identified with the mainstream understanding of Frankfurt School Critical Theory than Marcuse's somewhat more hopeful ones. Marcuse, however, no less than the others, was acutely sensitive to the enduring power of capitalism as a system that was continually restructuring itself. He, no less than the others, believed that capitalism reduced the masses to conformist consumerism and subjected the artist to the threats of the market system. His advocacy of revolution and his trust in art as an emancipatory activity, then, betray optimism uncharacteristic of the Frankfurt School. How, then, to justify a discussion on the value of literature drawing from disunified theory, often intransigent writings, and theorists who displayed an unprecedented understanding of the devastating impact of the advancing capitalist system on the very possibility of authentic art? Despite the obstacles and inevitable objections, there are good reasons for persisting.

In the first place, the particular synthesis of ideas made available in the work of these theorists in their response to the work of Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Lukács, among others, provides a thoroughly interdisciplinary framework from which to approach the question of aesthetics and politics. The residue of German philosophical thought and the theoretical musings of thoughtful critics such as Lukács lace the Critical Theory developed by the Frankfurt School thinkers discussed here, offering powerful ruminations on the interpenetrative weave of economics, sociopolitics, and art.[7] The latter was granted an especially privileged place in their writings, despite, and indeed because of, their growing despair over the threats to its autonomy from the rise of monopoly capitalism and the phenomenon Adorno and Horkheimer were to describe as the "culture industry."[8]

The aporias of realist aesthetic theory are forcefully exposed by the interventions of critics such as Adorno, as the terms of Marxist aesthetics are investigated and reformulated to account for new economic and historic developments. In their dedication to the

principle of nonidentity thinking, which takes distinct forms in the writings of different theorists, they redefined the terms of revolutionary art well beyond the reflection theories so dear to conventional Marxist aesthetics. Their sometimes congruent, often conflicted, and ultimately disunified theoretical work thus nevertheless includes an intriguing set of terms for debate on culture, aesthetics, and the forces and relations of production. The *heuristic* value of the concepts of the culture industry, reification (*pace* Lukács), instrumental rationality, the rule of equivalence, nonidentity thinking, negative dialectics, aesthetic formalism, and utopian negation, to name but a few of the ideas developed in the work of the three writers, continues unabated in any discussion purporting to undertake an analysis of the artwork in global capitalism. Yet these must be seen as elements of rather than formulae for a postcolonial analysis of literature.

The philosophical claims made by these thinkers for artistic knowledge ("truth content" for Adorno), moreover, are particularly useful for a critique of postcolonial literature at a time when it is threatened dually by a market system that not only seeks to shape the text, but also threatens to straitjacket the responses to it. In dwelling on the contradictions and negative knowledge of art, Frankfurt School theorists broke new ground for a reconsideration of the relationship between subject and object, art and reality. In refusing the easy consolations of reconciliation and in distinguishing the knowledge of art from conceptual knowledge alongside the inherent imbrication of art with the real world, these theorists were casting these relationships in dialectical terms, even if they could not always agree among themselves or provide accessible definitions and conceptual clarity, or indeed a full assessment of art forms like jazz that were emerging in a vernacular engagement with modernity.

Each of the theorists considered in this study offers clusters of observation and insight that may not be reducible to clear-cut formulae, but pronounce for the aesthetic project a complexity of relationship between the aesthetic, political, personal, and collective that allows the critic to raise the question of the value of art without losing sight of its submission to the socioeconomic forces of the administered world. The demands of aesthetic and political accounting enjoined by the particular burden of postcolonial criticism endorse this special approach because it

enables a simultaneous consideration of the relation of art to "the actual life-processes of society," as Adorno puts it, and the capacity of authentic art "to distinguish itself from these processes" (*Prisms* 23). The Frankfurt School theorists discussed here provide some of the most useful vocabulary for exploring the question of the value of art with these strictures in mind. Their extraordinary efforts to conceptualize art as the privileged arena of alterity offer an undeniably potent means of recuperating postcolonial literature as recalcitrant even when administered. Without insisting on artistic autonomy—arguably a conceptual cul-de-sac in investigating the validity of artworks—the potential yield of an aesthetic probe of this impulse in the artwork is worth investigating if we wish to understand the artwork as meaningful from within as well as without.

Finally, in light of its claims to a global theory of culture and society, moreover, Critical Theory demands revaluation from a perspective it could not have foreseen, that of postcolonial experience and its cultural expressions, and of the capacity for aesthetic recalcitrance in the vernacular phases of the advance of global capital. If the specific historical circumstances they were presented with enabled their theoretical formulations, they were also hobbled by them. None of these thinkers, Marcuse perhaps excepted, was particularly concerned with non-Western cultures in their thinking about art and the social world; even Marcuse was more interested in non-Western politics than in its cultures. As Jay ruefully observes, Adorno remained "Eurocentric to the last," never feeling "any real sympathy for American, let alone more 'primitive' forms of culture outside the West" (*Adorno* 120).[9] Neither Adorno nor Benjamin devoted themselves to "a *differential* historical analysis of separate aesthetic forms, and their respective technical elements" (Bloch et al. 108). The intermingling of high and low, popular and avant-garde strands in the media with which they were both originally concerned was not foreseen by either, rendering their critiques of particular art forms open to reinterpretation and supplementation. Adorno's now infamous inability to envisage the dynamics of form in the development of jazz stands as a useful caution to bear in mind as we attempt to recuperate from his work the terms for a new critical aesthetics for the study of postcolonial literature. A comparable appearance of carnivalesque, fantastic, and multicultural linguistic features in

postcolonial and certain other types of literature allows for those prized features Adorno described as "atonality," which we might revise in literary terms as Bakhtin's "heteroglossia" or in particularly postcolonial terms as the disruption of "global English" and "vernacular aesthetics," which might serve as the basis for investigating the revolutionary content of art anew, despite the ersatz end of autonomous art. The high/low culture divide that appears with regularity in the Frankfurt School theory of the culture industry cannot alone suffice for an adequate consideration of these elements, even if it continues to obtain in limited measure and with contemporary inflections.[10] Nor indeed is it possible to accept the notion of a unified and centralized administering mechanism, one which might have obtained with much greater credibility in the context of American Fordism encountered by Adorno and Horkheimer when they were writing *Dialectic of Enlightenment* than it would in the fragmented and disorganized capitalism of today. Far more significant is the Frankfurt School thinkers' general understanding of the ways in which both high and low culture, however defined, would come to bear the marks of reification associated with the development of capital, even if they escaped its administrations in rare moments.

Central to the formulation of its terms by the thinkers most closely associated with aesthetics and culture is the Frankfurt School theorists' study and explanation of the development of cultural forms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Dismayed by the process of technological expansion and capital accumulation, these thinkers found themselves forced to assess the impact of advanced monopoly capitalism on the form, style, and aura of art as it was becoming modified and commodified by these developments. As such then, it was the collision of tradition and modernity under the ascendant—even triumphant—new economic order that prompted their observations. A reconsideration of this context in the present forcefully reveals both the value of their ideas for a critique of postcolonial artistic production and their ultimate inadequacy for explaining its variety or its multiple coordinates.

The march of global capitalism is now widely acknowledged as a worldwide phenomenon. If the encounter between different value systems and worldviews is an obsolete matter for the West—however arguably following Francis Fukuyama's provocative thesis

—it is far from irrelevant to the experience of many postcolonial societies who continue to be described, perhaps equally arguably, as "living in many centuries at once."[11] At the very least, there is no definitive sense in which this encounter is at an end for many societies more recently entering that phase of commodification that the Frankfurt School theorists have already assumed to be largely the case for Anglo American and other Western societies. It is not necessary to idealize the past or tradition to explore the ramifications of this encounter as a subject in many post-colonial texts, only to acknowledge that the hands of the clock turn at a variant pace within particular spatiocultural chronologies of the development of capital, that unevenness is part of the spread of global capitalism, and that the "modern" is a beast with many faces. Besides, the articulation between contradictory forces within modernity, forces that include an insistence of local identity in the face of the collapsing of space, for instance, has always been a part of its dialectical engagement with the paradigms it attempts to supercede. Tradition itself, it must be conceded, finds its expression largely in terms of what is becoming defined as "modern." Indeed, Critical Theory's emphasis on capital and the changing relations of production as the moving forces behind modernity facilitates rather than thwarts our attempts to place postcolonial literature within a phase that may be contrastive in some ways, but is nevertheless comparable in others to economic and cultural movements in Europe at the time of Critical Theory's formulation. A trans-valuation of modernity as the progression of capital rather than as a "Western" or "European" phenomenon per se renders the ideas of Critical Theory immensely valuable for a current reckoning of the post-colonial artwork. The grounding of Critical Theory in a more or less clearly European framework, on the other hand, exposes its limitations for a postcolonial analysis even as its conceptual horizon accommodates it.

The notion of a single modernity has been long contested. It is not only the understanding of modernity as a phenomenon precipitated by a Western system of values that is being challenged today, but also the temporal/spatial scheme drawn from an exclusively Western understanding of modernity. Time, as the narrator of Rushdie's *Shame* solemnly notes, "cannot be homogenized as easily as milk" (6). The very notion of modernity, of course, is also undergoing considerable revisions, as "Western"

theories, such as Marxism, are themselves being considered within a more vernacular framework.[12] To the extent that the "postcolonial" implies "Third World," however euphemistically or obliquely, as I have attempted to demonstrate in the previous chapter, postcolonial modernities issue the most potent challenge to assumptions of synchronicity in the expansion of financial globalization as well as to the commonplace understanding of the staples of modernity. Placed within a force field (*Kraftfeld* for Adorno), the phenomenon of modernity— and its associated impact on cultural production—is being reconceptualized in postcolonial theory through the work of critics such as Dipesh Chakrabarty in terms of what Jay describes in his interpretation of the term as "a relational interplay of attractions and aversions that constitute . . . the dynamic, transmutational structure of a complex phenomenon" (*Adorno* 14). A central notion for the Frankfurt School theorists is one of "constellation" that signifies "a juxtaposed rather than integrated cluster of changing elements that resist reduction to a common denominator, essential core, or generative first principle" (Jay 14–15). It is not only that capitalist modernity clashing with its predecessorial form generates a confounding dissonance in the "later" sites of its development, but also that these sites conjugate its generative principles in their own logic, and that they are "later" only by a constricted standard that provides a less than flexible conceptual grid. The idea of modernity not merely as vernacular (usually another code for non-Western or Third World as historically retarded), but as essentially liquid might allow for a better understanding of postcolonial engagements with it. Liquid modernity suggests the idea of spread, but also unpredictability of shape, while also accommodating the possibility of multidirectional flows and a nonlinear scheme for understanding change. In thus implying a divorce from "the temporal structure of the statement, 'first in the West, and then elsewhere,'" as Chakrabarty puts it, liquid modernity also permits us to develop literary models free from dogged adherence to a period-based progression of -isms (*Provincializing Europe* 6). To propose this is not so much to suggest the irrelevance of historical and economic developments as it is to seriously attempt a constellative understanding of elements that may not be reducible to overarching schemes.

Despite his acute awareness of the enveloping force of the

culture industry, the promise of aesthetic truth lay, for Adorno, in the very mediation of art with advanced capitalism. Adorno and Marcuse were both able to grant that "artistic truth is still conserved by works which express the dissonant character of modern life" (Held 89). Adorno also insisted that the products of the culture industry could not be unproblematically conflated with works of art.[13] In *Aesthetic Theory,* he was to argue that the destruction of aura and the deaestheticization *(Entkunstung)* in modern avant-garde art demonstrates the process of encoding auratic qualities from within in techniques and form.[14] Given his resistance, moreover, to the subsumption of art in terms of the subject and to the problems of viewing cultural activities within reifying categories, it would seem that Adorno's work not only retains its significance for critical projects, but that it carries ideas of particularly contemporary relevance for postcolonial studies in its protest against the false closures of periodization and categorical divides. Even were we not to draw from the Frankfurt School theorists themselves the materials for considering postcolonial literature within a disjunctive phase of the development of capital, we would be obliged to consider that along with the dubious fruits of modernity, death comes more slowly to the truth-telling capacity of art that has yet to conclude the important business of chronicling the encounter of culture with the potent new forces and epistemological structures encapsulated in the name of modernity. It would seem presumptuous, or counterproductive at the very least, to attempt a total theory of a totalizing phenomenon that is nevertheless still in process. The challenge in locating postcolonial literature within the theoretical apparatus selected here is that of historicizing aesthetic norms—indubitably the project of Critical Theory in the hands of all three theorists—without succumbing completely to a stageist view of cultural development.

In the grip of what we might call "the postcolonial modern," the far reaches of the world now being drawn into the skein of global capital exert their own local sense of the tensions between space and place, calendrical and mystical time, tensions known to us as the classic conflicts associated with the march of modernity. Aesthetic responses to these tensions in contemporary postcolonial literature must certainly be located within the period-based divides of Western literary developments; they must also,

however, be situated within the context of those areas whose conditions of alienation may well replicate those experienced by the advanced capitalist world but that also offer a profound supplement, if not a downright remediation, on account of their having been at the receiving end of the exertions of capital through colonialism and its aftermath and having been obliged to forge resistance not only in terms of opposition to capitalist modernity (as was the case in India, for instance, until the "economic liberalization" of the nineties) but also through an anticolonialism that would reformulate alternative relations to time and space through the very grid of the "modern." The problem of justice, then, might be conceived by these societies (and their writers) in terms of "progressive" socialism (as again was the case in India, which pursued a Soviet socialist-style model for many years), in those of a refurbished humanism in the name of democracy, as well as in the aesthetic figuration of their own versions of an idealized and utopian "dream time" (an idealized "Ram Rajya" in India, for instance), or in the mode of utopian negation (so characteristic of the literature of the "mourning after" decolonization) that would fit less comfortably within linear schemes of progress.

If the global scope of capitalist modernity has emerged as a preoccupation of art and literature in mainstream postcolonialism, giving it its characteristic "transnational" and "postmodern" flavor, the field has also been identified with the project of social liberation, one usually identified more closely with realist and neorealist literary movements. The anxious divide between establishment First World postcolonialism and a postcolonial art more clearly committed to the struggle of the exploited masses in the postcolony constitutes one of the major fault lines in the field. Another silent breach, I am suggesting, has been widening steadily as the mainstream text is construed either as aesthetic pabulum or as void of a meaningful stance on social liberation, thus standing in danger of being ceded to conservative apolitical aesthetics, on the one hand, or to faux-liberal constituencies with a shallow sense of meaningful resistance, on the other. The criteria of exotic appeal or multicultural representativeness threaten to shape a restrictive context of reception in which the complex interplay of aesthetic formalism, utopian thinking, and the problem of justice feature but poorly, if at all. The mainstream postcolonial text is

thus lauded too easily for its radical content or seen as irrelevant to the project of social liberation. The option of assessing literature's stance toward justice within its aesthetic and formal order or indeed of investigating the very meaning of the idea of what constitutes justice stands in the via media between these choices.

Although a great deal of postcolonial writing as well as other cultural expression addresses the question of justice through the familiar genre of social realism and the model of communist equity, no less significant is the attempt of the postcolonial text that imagines justice through aesthetic modes more fictional than functional. As the promised utopias of humanism (under the *mission civilisatrice* of colonization), independence, self-governance, self-sufficiency (in production and consumption habits), socialism, globalization, and capitalism progressively fail the cause of liberation, neither particular changes in the relations and mode of production nor simplistic notions of modernity as a monolithic Western import have alone been able to explain failures in the postcolony. The postcolonial writer attempting to catalog "the dissonant character of modern life" is forced to confront the idea of emancipation as non-teleological and of temporality itself as ambivalent. The longing for the new that has endured in the work of so many writers from the colonies has taken various forms of expression that cannot be easily conflated with cultural developments that arise from a strong sense of passage from one era into the next in the West. That passage has been disjunctive at best for the rest.

As my readings of three canonical postcolonial literary texts will show, the exercise of art to respond to the changing (and uneven) relations of production and the meandering, digressive flow of liquid modernity is not typified by any particular set of literary strategies that mesh wholly with the categories (and by implication periods) of literary -isms. That capital is universal need not suggest that it produces predictable art forms everywhere. Nor are the stages of development from market to monopoly to consumer capitalism necessarily smoothly susceptible to periodization, even if "something really fundamental did change after 1945" (Jameson, "Discussion" 359). A foundational tenet of Marxist thought—that capital is a process and not a thing—need not imply a strictly developmental trajectory, except in

broad strokes. Heir to various legacies and temporal logics, the postcolonial writer's aesthetic choices may be profoundly historical, but that need not imply a rigidly temporal historicism. That is to say, it may well be true that aesthetic norms arise from the prevailing socioeconomic relations—this would certainly be the thrust of Frankfurt School Aesthetic Theory—but it must be recalled that theorists such as Adorno, Benjamin, Marcuse, and Lukács before them were trying to theorize a process they saw unfolding before them as the market seemed to gain almost total control of the cultural sphere. The fractal and disjunctive struggle for expression on a global scale that ensued in the aftermath of political decolonization is a phenomenon so profoundly processual that it can hardly be compressed into historical units of cultural development without considerable epistemological violence. What remains useful from the work of these theorists in a reading of postcolonial texts is their understanding that art was locked in a struggle with a rapidly changing market, that it could not escape commodification or its existence in a reified world, and that some artworks would respond to these conditions of alienation with moments of autonomy occasioned by their very administration. What cannot have been foreseen by them, however, is that the formal developments in these works would be administered not only by the global forces of developments in capital, but also by their unique histories of struggle with colonial mechanisms of regulation.

In considering the "inevitable pangs of bad conscience [that] must . . . accompany any attempt to capture Adorno in an introductory work . . . written in a language other than German," Jay offers the consolation that "the effects of a text, desired or not, are part of its meaning"—a view also held, he notes, by Benjamin and Leo Lowenthal (*Adorno* 13). Although the privileging of meaning in terms of reception would have been anathema to Adorno, as I intend to demonstrate in a section of my discussion of the "consumption" of Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey,* I would submit that the use of Adorno's formulations and those of the other thinkers under consideration here, developed originally in the context of select realist and modernist texts from the European tradition, does not so much translate their meaning solely into terms of reception as it offers a tribute to their inexhaustibility and to the ongoing "effects" of their work in

contemporary contexts. The necessary heresy involved in attempting to formulate a critical aesthetics for postcolonial studies from Critical Theory functions as a species of translation, of a bearing-across, from one context to another, with something gained, but something lost.[15] To the extent, however, that the significance of their ideas cannot be confined either to the original texts or to their particular historical moment of production, the works of the Frankfurt School theorists on aesthetic theory become available to us as necessarily mediated by cultural, historical, and geographical gaps, but not entirely lost to us because of them. If anything, their endurance and their limitations together function to underscore the importance of the historical moment of this theory's production and that which now inflects its use. By the same token, this enforced traveling of a theory situated in time and place must also oblige it to bear the brunt of experiences and expressions not originally imagined as integral to it.

In recent years, numerous studies have sought to put Frankfurt School Critical Theory in dialogue with post-structuralism, opening up further avenues for excavating their ideas for contemporary contexts.[16] In their own work, Adorno and Benjamin's shared interest in conceptual constellations, alongside their subscription to the integrity of the aesthetic object, and their commitment to interpretation from contemporary perspectives offer the most powerful argument for continuing deliberation on the status of art, now in the arena of postcolonial articulation. At the start of a new millennium, as the tyranny of the culture industry assumes global proportions and the proliferation of diverse sorts of cultural expression is being enabled by it, the question of the value of art is more urgent than ever. While the question, then, may be the same as that posed to the theorists who so devoted their thoughts to it, the answers may now be both similar and different.

Postcolonial Critical Aesthetics

Grounded in Critical Theory, this study proposes a postcolonial critical aesthetics not so much as a formula and recipe for all time (or for all postcolonial literary production), but as an approach cognizant of the following fundamental principles: Postcolonial

literature is a part of the processes of an administered world *(verwaltete Welt)*. Its place within the prevailing relations of production and the ongoing phase of capital development are entirely relevant to the critical purpose, as is its relationship to ideology. A postcolonial aesthetic theory divorced from the socioeconomic reality profits neither the aesthetic nor the political objectives of postcolonial literature. It is from within the placement of the literary text in the framing administrations of capital and practical disciplinarity, however, that its import and significance must be released through interpretation. A critical method that refuses to recognize literary impulse toward distinction from life processes perceives neither the market's constitutive need for some modicum of artistic autonomy (the market also gives if it takes away!) nor the artwork's compulsion toward its own order, the latter sometimes exceeding the author's ideological raiments as well as the market's determinations. This study thus enjoins attention to the following key issues: the aesthetic dimension of representation in postcolonial literature, its sensuous apprehension of reality variously conjugated through particularism and the individual consciousness, and its response to the project of social liberation ("utopia"). Yet this work can insist on this heuristic only on the grounds that these issues gain in significance precisely within a framework that acknowledges the conflictual and interpenetrative relation among the market, the text, and the author. Each of these exists as a historical category, even if the artwork claims the distinction of the aesthetic sphere.

In drawing from the terms of Critical Theory, therefore, this study insists upon the discrepancy in the sociohistorical conditions of post-colonial literature within the dominant paradigm of culture under late capitalism. As the vernacular expression of a new phase in the dialectic of modernity, postcolonial literature provides glimpses of the contradictions and unevenness of global social development. Arising within a variant historical context in which the progression of modernity coexists with what Amitav Ghosh describes as the alternative time scheme of "the fox-holes of history," postcolonial literature fits, but uncomfortably so, in the dominant global chronology of late capitalism. The intervention of vernacular languages and contexts in the globally commodified works of postcolonial literature provide for a particular sort of the hitherto mentioned "atonality" that is productive as a basis for

understanding its impulse toward recalcitrance. In other ways, too, the structure and figurative choices of postcolonial literature draw attention— but do not always command it—toward its formal negotiations with expected and authorized themes and the transmission through its formal organization of alternative apprehensions of the dialectic of modernity. Developing within multiple cultural and linguistic contexts, postcolonial literature is not only significant for its formal innovations of traditional forms; indeed, it is of value as "novel" because of them. These modes of *nouveauté* offer partial portraits of the operation of vernacular modernities even as they expose the ways in which sophisticated academic versions of the culture industry are able to take materials from "other" cultures and recode them as both traditional and new in the light of First World discovery. This tension between perceptions of the old and new also exposes a fundamental artistic alienation in the postcolonial work—a staple of authentic art for many of the Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt School—as it continues to characterize the postcolonial writer "divided to the vein," in Derek Walcott's memorable phrase, by multiple sociocultural forces. As I elaborate in my readings of the works by Mistry, Rushdie, and Roy, it is possible to recuperate some of the features of its resistance to instrumental rationality from the excessively administered world in which they exist, even if the ideally autonomous art that "has renounced consumption" is no longer possible (Adorno, "On the Fetish Character" 31). Adherence to claims about autonomy or a "pure" intelligence native to the autotelic text is neither defensible nor particularly profitable in the assessment of post-colonial literature. The idea of "native intelligence" thus necessarily functions as double coded within these multiple contexts that foil even as they marginally retain the conditions of artistic resistance to the logic of equivalence.

To suggest the broad function of cataloging the interregnum of capital development for postcolonial literature, then, is not to remove it from its context of production within the academic versions of the culture industry in the First World academy. The postcolonial work, particularly of the cosmopolitan variety, is separated with difficulty from the fate of art as such in the age of advanced monopoly capitalism. Although the writers considered in this study do not meet the criterion of "mass" culture, it would be

impossible to argue that the ideology of the culture industry is without impact on the postcolonial text—in terms of its origins, form, content, and function. Indeed, the anglophone post-colonial novel is an unabashedly elitist construction from the vantage point of the Third World where a majority of the population would be alienated not only by virtue of language but also by the fundamental lack of literacy. A very particular version of the culture industry is being proposed here, as it obtains under the conditions of the emergence of postcolonial studies as a First World discipline. Writers and texts that accede to the canon under the banner of postcolonial and minority literature are already assumed to have cleaved to certain requirements that would ensure their inclusion. Even if the novels considered in this study are not demotic works of art, they are nevertheless "popular" within large segments of the academy and sometimes among public readership as well. What I am laboring to make explicit is the principle of the culture industry as it operates within the supposedly elite arena of university and academic culture, producing formulae consistent with the ideology of a culture industry that engages in "incessant 'speculation about its [art's] efficacy'" and is dominated by a preoccupation with its exchange value (Held 91; Adorno, "On the Fetish Character" 40–41). This process of conversion of artistic truth into currency in the postcolonial aftermath is predictable in its capacity as a commodity among commodities. The contradictions of capitalism and culture thus render the idea of artistic intelligence profoundly ambivalent.

How then is one to release the submerged intelligence of literature from the tangled weave of art and socioeconomics? In Critical Theory, artistic alienation and nonidentity serve as the most useful guiding lights for this task. Adorno's surprising solution to the problem of the intimacy of art with the conditions of its production—its collusion and collision with its dynamic and evolving processes—derives from Marx's own recognition of the need to strip the halos that surround art while retaining for it the capacity to imagine the desires and needs repressed in conventional reason. Marx's critique of rationality implicitly faults its irrationality and its failure to unite reason with the principles of freedom, justice, and happiness. Adorno's notion of true nature and true reason also reinforce this reconciliation, even if he

nevertheless concedes that this is a failed project in most art. It is in the tension between art and politics that we are encouraged to look for the truth-content of art, for therein lies the ideal of freedom and fullness that is lost to sight in the world of work and power.

In the discussion that follows, I will necessarily ignore the undeniable differences among the three thinkers, seeking instead those convergences that stem from their common subscription to the truths of Marxism and their suspicion of its orthodoxies. In their own distinct ways, the critics under consideration here were drawn to the Marxist ideal of the whole man and the uses of art in measuring the fullness and emptiness of life. Human suffering, art's relation to this suffering, the protest of the particular in artistic representation, art's formal mediations, and its elusive portrayal of utopia are recurrent themes in the aesthetics of the Critical Theorists. Like Benjamin before him and Marcuse who continued to develop his theories after him, Adorno saw history as the history of human suffering. Many of the thinkers associated with the Frankfurt School educe their theories from this fundamental scheme in approaching art, one derived largely from Marx. Marx's belief that "the objectification of the human essence, both theoretically and practically, is necessary in order to *humanize* man's senses, and also to create the *human senses* corresponding to all the wealth of human and natural being" issues a central role to the aesthetic faculties in the assessment of human social development (*Early Writings* 162). Man's relationship to nature and the rooting of sense perception and experience in nature were central to Marx's understanding of the emancipation of man. "Man *lives* from nature," he claimed, "i.e. nature is his *body,* and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die. To say that man's physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature" (127). Adorno, Benjamin, and Marcuse's acute understanding of the alienation of modern life stems from their shared subscription to Marx's contention that "every self-estrangement of man from himself and nature is manifested in the relationship he sets up between other men and himself and nature" (130). Nature assumes a central place in these thinkers' conception of the potential for human liberation. Their critique of domination outlines its threefold manifestations: in the

domination of physical nature, that of man by man, and, finally, in the subjugation of human nature itself. Adorno claims that "art corrects the domination of nature as the domination of an other" (*Aesthetic Theory* 113).

Adorno's thinking about mimesis and aesthetic comportment owes a great deal to Benjamin's early work on language as well as to the shared sense of all three thinkers that art recalls what has been repressed by reified consciousness and sundered from nature. Marcuse's insistence upon the principle of "harmony" and the "truth" of art and his understanding of artistic mimesis betray a similar commitment, even if these views are expressed in terms rather less philosophical. To neglect the artwork's ideal of harmony and nature and its particular conjugation of universal desires beyond exchange society, then, is to discount its very novelty. For Adorno, art "reminds us of . . . an objectivity freed from the categorial structure. This is the source of art's rationality, its character as knowledge" (*Aesthetic Theory* 330). It is in the ability to cull from nature that which is not merely empirically known, and in the "capacity to perceive more in things than they are" through a "gaze under which the given is transformed into an image" that the potential for a "humanized nature" reside (330).

In his discussion of "Frankfurt School Marxism and the Ethical Meaning of Art," Norman Fischer suggests that the two traditions associated with Marxist aesthetics that do not confine their analysis to social realism are those of "utopian negation" and "aesthetic formalism" (362). Adorno, Benjamin, and Marcuse are the theorists most readily linked with these theoretical developments in aesthetics. Adorno's general pronouncements on the diminishing possibility of autonomous art, indeed autonomous thought, under conditions of reification and the near identity of ideology and reality appear to coexist with his insistence on the signal importance of *retaining* this capacity under the most hostile of conditions, in a phrase, after Auschwitz. The preservation of the utopian moment is significant in the work of all three writers considered in this study, regardless of how differently it is articulated. The very crisis of overaccumulation must paradoxically produce a turn toward aesthetics in the middle of rampant confusion. In *Aesthetic Theory,* Adorno claims that "the making of every authentic work contradicts the *pronunciamento* that no more can be made" (251). In the final reckoning, the

aesthetic dimension was a "humanizing force whose power was to be expanded in an alienated society", a potential that Marx himself had earlier located in works of literature (Nägele 208).[17]

As an object freighted with the power of representation, the post-colonial text is enmeshed within larger social desires that are driven by the primacy of the epistemic subject and its affirmation of identity between subject and object. Rey Chow likens "the new 'desire for our others'" that emerges in postcoloniality with "the same positive, projectional symptoms of fascism" that grow from "a longing for a transparent, idealized image and identifying submission to such an image" (44–45). The function of the postcolonial as "limit-text, the Anti-West" (Bhabha, "The Other Question" 73) and of the colonized as Manichean other (JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics*) are topics that have been explored by many a postcolonial critic. As Asha Varadharajan notes, however, "the recognition of incommensurability has not prevented the proliferation of Procrustean beds in which bodies are simultaneously identified and othered" (23). The principle of commodification and reification is not without consequence for critical practices caught up in its driving urge to identity equivalence and exchange value. Driven by the logic of exchange value, this evaluative process can effect a misleading transference of its own logic onto the literary text perceived exclusively as commodity.

The ethical import of resisting this transference resides not so much in a subsequent transparent agenda for politics as it does in the very process of an aesthetic negotiation that allows the otherness of the art object to lie just a little beyond the task of transparent interpretation. To inhabit—epistemologically—the topos of the reader through the trope of native informancy is to foreclose on the text's otherness as aesthetic object. A dialectical aesthetics that does not turn particulars into mere examples or concepts such as "postcolonial" into dominant and mystifying generalities struggles to retain the integrity of the object without losing the capacity to engage with it in its particularity. From *this* particularity, a sense of the universal may well be grown, but that is hardly a predictable consequence. The sacredness of the text is here allied with what Eagleton describes as the "equally 'sacred' pursuits of critique and commentary, in which a language similarly unleashed from intention into its material fullness may

catch in its net of mutual resonances some of the 'idea,' the pattern of diverse significations of the text it studies" (*Walter Benjamin* 117). Within a dialectical model of negations, the possibility of recalcitrance and truth-content can be conceived without altering or relinquishing the primary context that dominates in the cluster of elements that comprise the phenomenon of the rise of postcolonial studies as a First World "practical" discipline.

From the standpoint of this model, criticism "involves an 'aesthetic' responsiveness to the particularity of its object alien to . . . dominative rationality" (Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin* 117). To perform this act as a sacred vocation is not to act as "the object's obedient ghost," but to act like something of its agent in submitting to its logic and conceding its otherness prior to subjective interpretation. In this scheme, it is not only the artwork that must be accorded the integrity of the object as epistemic entity, but also its own object of "knowing" what it seeks to represent. "The real," as Eagleton points out, "is by necessity empirically imperceptible, concealing itself in the phenomenal categories . . . it offers spontaneously for inspection. . . . It is not merely that certain aspects of the real are illuminated and others obscured; it is rather that the presence of the real is a presence constituted by its absences, and *vice versa*" (*Criticism and Ideology* 69). The principle of nonidentity thinking not only grants to art its own mode of producing reality, but it also acknowledges the integrity of the object in a world given to conceiving of the other in terms of the self. Dialectical thinking is not without political import; if anything, in its insistence on the integrity of the object, it is about the content of the political and its failure to transcend the limitations of instrumental reason. It may be necessary at this juncture to point out that it is important for Adorno that the ideal of identity not be discarded as the repository of a potential utopia, only that the transparent "correspondence of the thing-in-itself to its concept" be recognized as "*hubris*" (*Negative Dialectics* 149).

In the theories of Adorno, Benjamin, and Marcuse, art is fundamentally other to what we generally think of as reality. Operating within the realm of alterity, the aesthetic object obliges us to confront the limits of representation and the fallacy of readings that seek to subsume and consume the text in the subject's projectional fantasies. Models of cognition usually

operate within the code of identity or adequation of concept to thing, defining "identity as the correspondence of the thing-in-itself to its concept" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 149). The nonidentity principle elaborated by various thinkers of the Frankfurt School exposes the futility of grasping the nonconceptual through conceptual means, emphasizing instead the excess that lies beyond this grasp. As Held explains in his introduction to the term,

> The falseness of the claims of identity thinking can be revealed by negative dialectics, the thinking that explores non-identity. Negative dialectics assesses the relation between concept and object, between the set of properties implied by the concept and the object's actuality. . . . Non-identity thinking employs language, through the construction of "constellations" of concepts, as a connotative or indicative device. Thus specific sides of objects are revealed which are inaccessible to identity thinking and the dogmatic application of classificatory schema. (215)

Representation puts in question that which is represented, rather than resolving its contradictions. In a perhaps inadequate analogy with Adorno's view of the object as never "wholly known," the artwork as an epistemic object and its own ostensible object of representation both confront the limits of objective knowledge (*Negative Dialectics* 14). In granting the primacy of the object, critical aesthetics obliges us to instate alterity as beyond instrumental reason and thus beyond the limiting terms of

exchange value in a world of commodities. For Adorno, in particular, "art is a property of the object, the artwork, and not the subject (nor indeed the reception of the work)" (Buhler 166). In recalling us to the integrity of the artwork as inexhaustible object, Adorno does not discount the force of historical emplacement or the impact of this force on both form and content. In Adorno's terms, as Buhler explains,

> the social dimension is something that analysis or interpretation reads out of how content is sedimented in the artwork as form, not something to be read into the artwork from outside. Social context, even the study of reception, may indeed be important research questions, but they do not bear on the question of what constitutes art in the emphatic sense. (166–67)

The idea of value, which is integral to a consideration of art in the real world, has most often been translated in the postcolonial context in terms of market and commodification.[18] While these notions of value and realpolitik are obviously tremendously significant when considering the version of postcoloniality that has been mobilized for examination in metropolitan discussions, *Native Intelligence* insists on a restoration of value to postcolonial literature on grounds of its aesthetic identity as an object among objects, and as an object *Ding-an-sich* capable of also suggesting the limit of reificatory thought.

Adorno draws his understanding of the complex modes of artistic truth-content as coexistent with its socially relational identity from a Marxist formulation of the double character of art. On the one hand, Marx insists that "although our time of scientific and technical revolution calls for an ever-increasing measure of

teamwork, the work of a scholar, a writer, or an artist is not *directly* bound up with other people and may actually suffer from direct social intervention." At the same time, however, he declares: "Yet such work presupposes a community with others; it draws on the experience of others, it is essentially a form of social activity despite all its autonomy" (*Early Writings* 157). In *Aesthetic Theory,* Adorno emphasizes this point by focusing on the otherness of art as integral to its inherent logic:

> Art perceived strictly aesthetically is art aesthetically misperceived. Only when art's other is sensed as a primary layer in the experience of art does it become possible to sublimate this layer, to dissolve the thematic bonds, without the autonomy of the artwork becoming a matter of indifference. (6)

In its conflicted relation with the world beyond, art imitates itself, copying not the world as it finds it, but that which *becomes* under the laws of aesthetic mimesis. In a ringing declaration on the potential of art to transform that of which it is a semblance, Adorno declares:

> Art is semblance even at its highest peaks; but its semblance, the irresistible part of it, is given to it by what is not semblance. . . . No light falls on men and things without reflecting transcendence. Indelible from the resistance to the fungible world of barter is the resistance

> of the eye that does not want the colors of the world to fade. Semblance is a promise of nonsemblance. (*Negative Dialectics* 404–5)

As the Frankfurt School theorists argue, art's relation with the empirical world is a conflicted and complex one. Adorno explains that

> Art negates the categorical determinations stamped on the empirical world and yet harbors what is empirically existing in its own substance. If art opposes the empirical through the element of form—and the mediation of form and content is not to be grasped without their differentiation—the mediation is to be sought in the recognition of aesthetic form as sedimented content. (5)

The structure of "autonomimesis" allows art to resist the totalism of dominative reason as it retains a fluid openness in the relation of subject to object, one in which it illustrates the principle of assimilating to rather than absorbing the other. Adorno's meditation on beauty in *Aesthetic Theory* further elaborates on its connection with nonidentity thinking. In his critique of Kantian aesthetics, Adorno conceives of beauty as a historical category that is deeply mediated rather than simply available to us as a "natural" phenomenon; as a trace of the nonidentical and of alterity, beauty is allied to art in that both require an assimilation to the object. The impossibility of determining and assigning to art a specific function underscores this relationship of nonidentity.

Those who would argue, as Goldmann does, that the embeddedness of art and the artist in the real world fetter their capacity for any meaningful transcendence must be answered by a consideration of the various factors that contribute to art's productive alienation from the res. If artistic transcendence is a fiction, neither is its embeddedness so complete that we do not recognize the ways in which it differs from life-processes in its impulse toward transformative mimesis. Without denying the artist's prior definition by a given zeitgeist, it is nevertheless possible to submit the artistic artifact as distinctive from its determinations by virtue of two further considerations: its eccentric form and its inherent instability. In the Frankfurt School's much revised version of Marxist aesthetics, the formal virtues of the artwork assume the burden of alienation in dialogue with its content. Artistic alienation, the mainstay of art's freedom, is affiliated with the embodiment of content in form:

> "Aesthetic form" means the total of qualities (harmony, rhythm, contrast) which make an oeuvre a self-contained whole, with a structure and order of its own (the style). By virtue of these qualities the work of art *transforms* the order prevailing in reality. This transformation is "illusion," but an illusion which gives the contents represented a meaning and a function different from those they have in the prevailing universe of discourse. (Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* 81).

Marcuse's meditations on form and artistic mimesis, admittedly

more crudely formulated than Adorno or Benjamin's, nevertheless capture a common impulse to understand the artwork from within. The content of art, subjected to creative processes of formalization, obtains its unique significance within the logic of the work as a whole for all three thinkers. In the aesthetic dimension, language, form, organization, and the artwork's impulse to autonomy become the engines driving the mimetic faculty to imitate a reality incommensurate with the repressive laws of equivalence:

> Although the *content* of an artwork may indeed tell the story, depict the image, or convey the perceptions of a particular historical class, the aesthetic *form*—the totality of qualities that make the work a self-contained whole set off from the external reality—universalizes and thereby transforms and transcends this content. (Katz 182)

The alchemic transformation of the particularities of the real through the workings of the artistic alembic effects the first of these removals from life as we know it, making meaning at once more simple and more complex. The proliferation of possibilities unleashed through this transformative process return us to a revaluation of the real through a useful ambiguity that frees the imagination for the contemplation of another purpose. The desire to be free of dominative rationality is betrayed through the logic of aesthetic form and through the unique modes of ambiguity enfolded into the artwork's internal regime.

Yet another removal of art from the world of instrumental reason results from the unyoking of definitive meaning from auctorial intent. Subjective intention and the text's exchange value in the economy of representation are both inadequate grids for understanding the literary text. Adorno submits that "the content

of a work of art begins precisely where the author's intention stops; the intention is extinguished in the content" (*Notes to Literature* 13). The intricate weave of form and content, intention and its articulation, the market and its inevitable loopholes make of interpretation a daunting task.

One might recall at this juncture that the act of interpretation etymologically implies not only elucidation but translation and, therefore, an inevitable loss of the original. The encryption of conception into form introduces a phantom intention, yet another loss of the original even before the work is set before us. In more than one sense, then, the poetic is always beyond us. In "The Task of the Translator," Benjamin ascribes an almost sacerdotal function to poetry *(Illuminations)*. As sacred text, the scriptive field is not available for a transparent reading that would reduce its ritual ceremoniality to a serviceable interpretation. Wielding Occam's razor, Benjamin strips away all pretension to these violent extractions and reduces the critical act to its true purpose: that of meditation on art's intrinsic identity and its pregnant potential for signification. As I understand it, it is with this critical stance in mind that he pronounces the well-known dictum, "No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener" (78). Benjamin's messianism has been much criticized, in his treatment of both literature and history. It is not necessary to enter into that debate here, save to note that in insisting on the sacred inscrutability of the text he allows us to ponder the implications of translation/interpretation as failures—but useful failures—by definition. It is not so much the status of the postcolonial literary work as "intentional object" (Krieger's phrase, 97) that emerges in this understanding as its capacity for surplus and ultimately irreducible signification.

Benjamin's views on language are seminal to an understanding of his views on the sacred inscrutability of the text. As Lunn notes, "in his first important article, 'On Language as such and the Language of Men' (1916), Benjamin developed the symbolist insistence that language communicates itself and not subjective or intersubjective meaning or mental pictures of objects" (173). Greatly influenced by his learning in Jewish mystical sources, Benjamin was to write in 1913:

> I have never been able to do research and to think in any way other than, if I may so put it, in a theological sense—namely, in accordance with the Talmudic teaching of the forty-nine levels of meaning in the Torah. (*Briefe,* vol. 2, 524)

As his own constellative and paratactic writing style also suggests, Benjamin's hermeneutic stance was developed on the understanding that the significance of meaning was to be released by a reverential reading that paid due attention to the text's capacity for plurisignification. Benjamin's concept of ambiguous language and Adorno's insistence on formal mediation and the nonidentity between subject and object, differently conceived and developed, nevertheless offer productive avenues for exploring the artwork's capacity—in certain moments—to resist identity with the world of instrumental reason and administered reality.

In the context of the highly politicized field of postcolonial studies, I have suggested that all "truly" postcolonial texts are freighted with great and particular expectations. Within this matrix, the empire does not write, it writes back to an implied reader who is in eager expectation of its recriminations and its transformative message. There is, as it were, a brisk market for this sort of literature in the metropolitan world that has made clear its need for new information and pleasures as well as for new formulae for ethical action. This circumstance and the associated phenomena of commodification and "selling out" have occasioned considerable comment, demonstrating a not unworthy concern with the embeddedness of art in the real. The particular modes of resistance and transformation available to it have received far less attention because of the assumption that the text is either so far removed from real life as to disable the possibility for meaningful responses to it or so deeply immersed in it (and in the market) as to cloud its promise completely. Distance from life would seem by definition to thwart an engagement with it, but immersion in its deep and treacherous waters would never permit sight of the necessary bank. Adorno and Benjamin both suggest critical stances

for negotiating the question of artistic freedom, without surrendering an understanding of art's determinations by its socioeconomic and political context. Moreover, as Fischer points out, the work of Herbert Marcuse in *The Aesthetic Dimension* provides a partial blueprint for a powerful rapprochement between poesis and praxis and between the autonomy of art and its worldly tether. This putatively contradictory reconciliation is expressed by Marcuse, a thinker acutely aware of the ability of late capitalism to muffle opposition, in such paradoxes as the following, which proposes that art "is inevitably part of that which is, and only as part of that which is does it speak out against that which is" (*Aesthetic Dimension* 41). Marcuse's concept of "transforming mimesis" encapsulates the tense relation between the poetic and the real, the latter term favoring and endorsing the imbrication of art within the real and the former insisting on its unique capacity for transcending through transformation.

Those who would deny this particular attribute of art's separation from life might consider that it is not the poetic alone that removes itself from the usual course of things; ethical action is also distinguished by the desire for this dismissal of business as usual and the quest for alternatives that may well be limited by worldly considerations but strain to transcend them through all strategies available to it. The limitations of art as a spur to ethical action might also therefore be evaluated in light of the very embeddedness in the real that purportedly renders it of value. For Adorno, it is precisely the aesthetic distance of art from the real world that permits art to yield its promise of nonrepresentational integrity through innovations in its formal composition. The truth-content of art, therefore, is its ability to signal a future true society rather than a pseudoreflection of its shape from the given reality. Although Critical Theory has been accused of failing to achieve the unity of theory and praxis that is central to the Marxist project, several nuanced defenses of their aesthetic theory have sought to elaborate its unique provision of a dialectical rationale that mobilizes art's truth-content against its more transparent social content *(gesellschaftlicher Gehalt)*. Adorno paradoxically and dramatically states that "in so far as a social function may be predicated of works of art, it is the function of having no function" (*Aesthetic Theory* 336–37). Although the import of Marcuse's pronouncements is somewhat contradicted by his insistence on the

"political function" of art, declared on the opening page of his preface to *The Aesthetic Dimension,* elsewhere in the work he recuperates "political *potential*" as the operative term (emphasis mine). This aside, it would seem that the function of art is located by these thinkers in its purposeless purposiveness, a contradictory formation that reformulates its political relevance in terms of import rather than impact, while also illuminating the multiple facets of praxis as itself paradoxical.[19]

The final segment of this discussion on a conceptual grid for post-colonial aesthetics is dedicated to an examination of the category of utopia and its relation to the larger question of the "purpose" of art. In Marcuse's work, nonidentity thinking combines with the associated concept of "transformative preservation," which isolates for our examination the powerful role of memory in the workings of art, a concept also important in Benjamin and Adorno's work.[20] In fact, in locating the power of art in memory, Marcuse evinces his visible debt to Benjamin's forceful ideas on memory and remembrance both in the realm of the literary and in the historical.[21] The histoire-history vinculum, so flamboyantly explored in such postcolonial writers as Salman Rushdie, is of obvious relevance for the postcolonial project. The exercise of memory is a staple in postcolonial literature in various forms: memory in migration or exile, of a colonial past that must be commemorated, of a forged precolonial past that must be retrieved in however fragmented a way through acts of imagination. Memory as the engine of a transforming utopian vision, however, has not featured prominently in the criticism of postcolonial works. This function of memory has been elaborated in all three of the theorists under consideration here. Memory, the capacity for remembrance, and remembrance itself, the act of invoking the past from the oblivion to which it is always doomed, are the two modes of Marcuse's "transformative preservation.""The authentic utopia," Marcuse submits, "is grounded in recollection" (*Aesthetic Dimension* 73). In Marcuse's view, the script for the future is sought in the dustbins of history, as in Benjamin's own formulations in "Theses on the Philosophy of History" *(Illuminations)*. It is not onward progress and evolution that will lead to the moment of revolution, but the backward glance and a willful leap into a dimly glimpsed but promising juncture in the fading past. Marcuse phrases this sentiment thus:

> If the remembrance of things past would become a motive power for the struggle for changing the world, the struggle would be waged for a revolution hitherto suppressed in the previous historical revolution. (*The Aesthetic Dimension* 73)

As Jay has observed, in Marcuse's work memory and remembrance are inextricably connected with "the identification of essence with the past as well as with the future" ("Anamnestic Totalization" 3). Marcuse's adherence to Marxism allowed him this perspective, linked as it is with the powerful notion of dereification, a sort of remembering of "the human origins of the social world that had been mystified under capitalism as a kind of 'second nature'" (5). Jay suggests that Adorno's phrase, "every reification is a forgetting," which Marcuse may not have known of firsthand from Adorno's letter to Benjamin but may have encountered later, is nevertheless a central issue informing Marcuse's concept of memory ("Anamnestic Totalization").

Seizing for art a distinctive capacity for staging a struggle against the numbing operation of instrumental reason, Marcuse concludes *The Aesthetic Dimension* thus:

> Art fights reification by making the petrified world speak, sing, perhaps dance. Forgetting past suffering and past joy alleviates life under a repressive reality principle. In contrast, remembrance spurs the drive for the conquest of suffering and the permanence of joy. (73)

For Marcuse, "on a primary level, art is recollection" (*Counterrevolution and Revolt* 99). From the perspective of the future the present is also the past in waiting. One might then submit that the recounting of a present as if remembered (the novel form, which dominates in representations of postcolonial literature, is predicated on the notion of things already past) can also serve something of the same function. In Marcuse's account, "What has become form in the work of art has happened: it is recalled, re-presented. The mimesis translates reality into memory" (*The Aesthetic Dimension* 67). The prospect thus revealed is beautiful because it is utopia either by negation or implication or both, and/or because it is attended by a design that promises aesthetic pleasures, and/or because it consorts with the future by exhuming and preserving something that may or may not have existed in the past. The gratification that society always defers is thus made available in the artistic object that is constructed by the language of promised fulfillment. Herein lies the content of Marcuse's notion of "transforming preservation."

The notion of beauty with its obvious relation to form is thus of considerable significance in Marcuse's critical theory. For Marcuse, the function of sociopolitical transformation is closely tied to the expectation of beauty and his insistence on pleasure and its destructive repression by society. In his theory, "the aesthetic dimension" is that "transcendent realm of art and sensuousness in which are enforced none but the non-repressive 'laws of beauty' (Marx)" (Katz 177). Marcuse's theories about the potential of art to gratify and bring pleasure raise inevitable questions about cognitive empirical experience and our limited ability to render this pleasure measurable. Marcuse's contention, however, is that the aesthetic, by virtue of its capacity for bringing pleasure through remembrance of past joy, is thereby ascribed a propensity without necessarily being saddled with purpose. His arguments about the importance of beauty and pleasure in art, developed from an inflected reading of Freud's "On the Psychic Mechanism of Forgetfulness" and "The Psychopathology of Everyday Life," reveal his strong belief that "the promise of future happiness embodied in art was dialectically related to its retention of past instances of joy and fulfillment" (Jay, *Amanestic Totalization* 7). The conception of a *vordeutende Erinnerung* (anticipatory recollection) performs a dialog between past and present as the awakening of forgotten

truths that may yet be realized. Among these are "guiltless pleasure, sustained happiness, the harmony of sensuousness and reason, subjective fantasy and objective reality, nature and civilization" that "are preserved within and against the antagonistic world of work and power in the 'aesthetic dimension'" (Katz 169).

Although Marcuse insists in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* that recollection "is not remembrance of a Golden Past (which never existed), of childhood innocence, primitive man, et cetera" (70), he elsewhere insists on "the memory of happiness that once was" (*Five Lectures* 29) and "the past experience of happiness which spurns the desire for its conscious re-creation" (*Eros* 19). Jay argues that Marcuse's defense of Freud's archaic heritage as holding "symbolic value" betrays "a myth of original wholeness, of perfect presence, of a 're-membering' of what had been dismembered, whose roots, if in memory at all, were in remembered desire rather than remembered fulfillment" ("Anamnestic Totalization" 10–11). As Marcuse notes in an unpublished manuscript, artistic alienation is the engine of remembrance: "alienation may provide the art-ificial [sic] basis for the remembrance of freedom in the totality of oppression" (quoted in Katz 164). As far as a critical aesthetics for postcolonial literature is concerned, Marcuse's theory of memory gains in critical force when joined with his remarks on nonidentity thinking in art, enabling us to conceive of memory not in terms of anamnesis or simple recovery of past instances of fulfillment, but as *Gedächtnis,* or remembrance as the longing for a better future, an idea more fully developed by Adorno.

Adorno's position on remembrance is somewhat clearer since he refuses to engage in speculation about an actual golden age that must be regained, as Marcuse is sometimes tempted to in his ruminations. As Adorno explains, "Ever since Plato's doctrine of anamnesis the not-yet existing has been dreamed of in remembrance, which alone concretizes utopia without betraying it into existence. Remembrance remains bound up with semblance: for even in the past the dream was not a reality" (*Aesthetic Theory* 132). In Adorno's work, *Gedächtnis* came to hold the sense of "the reverential recollection of an object always prior to the remembering subject" (Jay, *Adorno* 68). In his view, "the object of art's longing, the reality of what is not, is metamorphosed in art as

remembrance. We must observe that "art lays claim to being unable to lie, and thus it is compelled to lie" (*Aesthetic Theory* 132). The utopic is thus a potential drawn from the broken promise of the past rather than from the past as such. The artwork's silence in the face of the unknowableness of utopia suggests its revolt against the existing order of rationality. Art imitates what does not, like utopia, yet exist, a notion itself driven by a subscription (like Benjamin's, and perhaps Marcuse's as well) to the Jewish prohibition on envisioning paradise. What is uncovered in the work of all these theorists who can be so different in their particular approaches and commitments is the idea of the aesthetic adventure as a critical interest in an otherwise instrumental world.

The critical questions that emerge for a postcolonial analysis from the thinking of Adorno, Benjamin, and Marcuse may be posed thus: How does aesthetic form inform the political import of the texts under consideration? How are the narrative of the modern and the problem of reification composed in the texts under consideration? How does the text alter conventional notions of mimesis? And finally, to repeat the question raised in the introduction, what "Third World" nonaligned with conventional rationality and identity thinking might be thus conjured in it? The holes and walls in these texts, their limits and constraints, are meaningful in a scheme that does take the nature of utopia or that of political activity for granted. The self-canceling mode of representation in all three of the texts bears something of the import, if not of utopian thinking, then at least of the importance of reconceiving the burden of representation as a task with dimensions that are political as well as cognitive and figurative. Beyond the scheme of the obviously good and evil, from some unexpected conjunction of events in the past and present, in the confusion and aporia produced by conditions of totality, is a possibility that may lie in waiting for discovery. The work of the artist remains the exercise of memory and recollection, of an imagination albeit tethered to and limited by the reality principle and the willingness to engage in a thoughtful, patient sort of arbitrage. The discovery of their import is that of the critic. Without neglecting their saturation by their ideological conditions of production, one might see that the texts' existence in a real world of work and power places them in that system of totality

that is itself a precondition for this potential. If this cannot be cause for celebration, it can nevertheless teach us the importance of renewing the yearning for a world in which things might be other than they are in ways we must forever struggle to imagine.

Chapter 4

The Economy of Postcolonial Literature: Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*

> No Realist contents himself with repeating forever what is already well known; that would not demonstrate a living relation with reality.
>
> —Bertolt Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke* (translated by author)

In an otherwise complimentary review of Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* (1991), Glenn Carey is chagrined to note a "serious flaw," to wit, the lack of an "appendix of Hindi expressions used in the story, with English translations" (127). David Ray's review of the novel in the *New York Times Book Review* also draws attention to Mistry's use of various languages: "The novel frequently poses a problem for all but the polyglot reader. Words from several Indian languages are dropped in liberally. Some passages are veritable pastiches of two or more languages. A glossary would have been welcome" (13). Although not traditionally part of the bailiwick of critics, book reviews and jacket notes—the extra-textual surround of literature—increasingly function as crucial accessory signs of the dynamics of the production and consumption of post-colonial products. Necessary handmaidens to the "marketplacing" of

postcolonial intellectual and artistic goods, they serve to provide telling tales of the vectoring of the artist and critic in the ideological graph mapping intellectual exchanges in the global market. Quite apart from the fact that the appendix proposed by the first reviewer would not be too helpful to the general reader in understanding the many Parsi-Gujrati expressions also used by Mistry—a fact Ray at least is aware of—what is recalled by the reviewers' observations is a much earlier debate on "intelligibility" and "universality" in "emergent" literature (Wlad Godzich's term), and its import for a contemporary reckoning of the historical dimension of aesthetic norms.[1]

More than a decade ago, in his review of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood,* John Updike bemoaned the profusion of untranslated Swahili and Kikuyu words in the novel. As Reed Way Dasenbrock notes, Updike was hardly alone then in making an implicit appeal for universality, a tendency Chinua Achebe had earlier denounced as synonymous with "the narrow, self-serving parochialism of Europe" (11). Carey and Ray's comments on the polyglossia of Mistry's novel once again raise the issue of linguistic bondage to the colonial center; equally importantly, they unwittingly exhort an examination of the larger question of the orientation and purpose of postcolonial literature, criticism, and pedagogy, and consequently of their place within the First World academic marketplace that has proved so hospitable to all three. While the presence of the English-language postcolonial novel may be said to function as a potent sign of a lamentable de facto glottophagia that disappears vernacular scripts from the larger postcolonial text, the anglophone postcolonial novel that repeatedly challenges standard English obliges us to conceive of polyglossia not only in terms of discrete languages but within the same one. In the case of an overtly polyglot novel like *Such a Long Journey,* vernacular language use functions as a blatant sign of what we might also consider the larger question of literary codes. The distress caused by the elision of vernacular "postcolonial" literatures and the displacement of "real others" often illogically obscures the problems arising from a politics of reading favoring either the consumption model or a hermeneutic of suspicion of "successful" literature. If "literature itself is a social institution," as Annette Kolodny points out in her observations on the theory, practice, and politics of feminist literary criticism in "Dancing

through the Minefield," "so, too, reading is a highly socialized—or learned—activity" (153).[2] Compare, too, Derek Attridge's observations about the expectations held of South African literature:

> The demand that the production and judgment of literature be governed by its immediate effectiveness in the struggle for change (or against change) has been immensely powerful, and has given rise to a suspicion of anything appearing hermetic, self-referential, formally inventive, or otherwise distant from the canons and procedures of the realist tradition. (243)

Those sorts of readings of texts that refuse to accord literature its literariness or deny the imbrication of sociopolitics within an aesthetic scheme are no less motivated by the technologies of inclusion and exclusion than the process of canon formation that "selects certain kinds of authors, texts, styles, and criteria of classification and judgement [including language], privileging them over others which may also belong in the same period" (Ahmad, *In Theory* 123). Without a critical commitment to a method capable of incorporating literary and aesthetic concerns, the text's strategies of revolt against literalism are likely to remain underappreciated.

As it stands, *Such a Long Journey,* yoked to its First World context, can be used (and apparently is used) to invoke a predictably smelly, chaotic mass of others who reinforce the superiority of the West, doubly so because the more resourceful among them, the author and many an expatriate postcolonial critic attempting to explicate the work, inter alia, have clearly voted on this issue with their fleet, transnational feet.[3]

> Rohinton Mistry's need for peace, order and (relatively) good government—Canada, Brampton version—is understandable when you read his novel, *Such a Long Journey*. It is a tidal wave of humanity at its smelliest and most chaotic. (Ross 2)

The easy slippage evidenced in Ross's comments between Mistry, the smelly subalterns, and the whole civic and governmental structure available to this "tidal wave of humanity" should convey something of the challenges posed in particular by postcolonial texts that operate in the mimetic register of realist fiction. The realist mode of Mistry's "fiction" and the ensuing propensity for it to be read as a representative and transparent text of postcolonial India further complicates the issue, for it is bootless to insist that it is, after all, a fiction and must be read with an apprehension of the ambiguities of "realistic" literary representation. The literary and disciplinary revetment behind which such a "retreat" (for this is how it will be seen) might have been possible (through what will inevitably be construed as "withdrawal" into discussions of techniques of storytelling, or of the dignity of the individual hero, or into the intransigence of the signifier, for example) has been unprofitably and prematurely eroded by the same wave of political interests that brought post-colonial cultural work into the purview of First World academe in the first place.

If attention to "the historic positional value" of the postcolonial and its commodification enjoins that we teach the conflicts (as Gerald Graff suggests), or the market (as Bishnupriya Ghosh argues), however, it also introduces us to an ideological context in which the order of aesthetics has been suppressed. Confronted with the economy of postcolonial literature in the global marketplace, criticism has attended but poorly to the development of an organon capable of dealing with the economy of the individual text—its functional arrangement of elements within a whole, its thrifty and careful management of its "resources," and

those components of value that contest its reduction to exchange value alone.

The particular challenge of *Such a Long Journey* is that of unlocking the complexities of mimetic representation in the tradition of realism in the precise historic moment that demands representation from the postcolonial text. If realism is all too glibly associated with naive epistemological assumptions, mimesis —its modality—occasions considerable anxiety in a great deal of contemporary discourse. If Plato's critique identifies the danger of mimesis in its "undermining of a stable notion of truth," contemporary suspicion of mimesis is directed toward "a false belief in the fixity of meaning" (Jay, *Cultural Semantics* 121, 120). In the traditional estimation, mimesis is a "conservative reproduction of existing signs," as Barthes insists (quoted in ibid. 120). Apt to engender "confusion of linguistic with natural reality," mimesis in the realist genre can be a risky trope for the postcolonial writer because it is associated with such terms as "copy," "reproduction," and "imitation," and so in danger of contributing to rather than challenging the problems of fixed identity that postcolonial discourse has consistently struggled against. In the register of realism, the slice of life was traditionally expected to reproduce the totality of social relations through a faithful copy of the world in which it is placed. The formal order of the novel—which also alerts us to its artifactuality—sometimes reinforces rather than attenuates this expectation. Mimesis allied with the powerful literary convention of realism can lead us to mistake the representational for the representative, the artistic copy for exact replica, the particular for an undifferentiated tidal wave of smelly subalternity, the representation of a character's discomfort with the crowd for an auctorial and textual stance of rejection of the masses. A whole set of conceptual exchanges can be precipitated not only despite our understanding of instrumental commodification but precisely because of it.

For Adorno, however, mimesis can function as a valuable resource in the struggle against the reigning power of instrumental rationality in the modern world. "If art were simply equivalent to rationality," he argues, "it would disappear in it and die off" (*Notes to Literature,* I, 147). Adorno points out that mimetic comportment "does not imitate something but rather makes itself like itself" as a contiguity rather than an appropriation or

domination (*Aesthetic Theory* 111).[4] This interpretation of mimesis capitalizes not on the arbitrariness of the sign so much as it does on the foundational understanding that "the mimesis of artworks is their resemblance to themselves" (104). As Adorno insists even when conceding the status of art as *fait social,* "Artworks detach themselves from the empirical world and bring forth another world, one opposed to the empirical world as if this other world too were an autonomous entity" (1). The danger that mimesis will produce the illusion of "knowledge" is rejected in Adorno's scheme of artistic nonfulfillment of the concept:

> The survival of mimesis, the nonconceptual affinity of the subjectively produced with its unposited other, defines art as a form of knowledge and to that extent as "rational." For that to which the mimetic comportment responds is the telos of knowledge, which art simultaneously blocks with its own categories. Art completes knowledge with what is excluded from knowledge and thereby once again impairs its character as knowledge, its univocity. (54)

Without the awareness of this nonfulfillment in the text's negotiation with its object, the "struggle for the sign" (Voloshinov's phrase) ends in the establishment of rational knowledge and the surrender of the text to the rule of equivalence (earlier referred to as "identity thinking"). The mimetic comportment of art may well be a response "to the telos of knowledge," but its success lies not in its reproduction but in its disjunctive modes of integrating into its fold that which exists in another order of reality:

> In artworks, the criterion of success is twofold: whether they succeed in integrating thematic strata and details into their immanent law of form and in this integration at the same time maintain what resists it and the fissures that occur in the process of integration. (7)

Form, thus broadly conceived, is the internal economy of literature. The saturation of content in form permits literary art its unique realm of experience. It is the formal comportment of art that intimates to us the proviso that if art *has* a cognitive content, it is not available as series of propositions. If there is a truth-content to art, it resides in its engaged alienation from a material world governed by instrumental reason and the rule of equivalence. Its immanent laws disallow the transparency we expect in identical thinking. In *Notes to Literature,* Adorno insists that "[art's] idea is as different from propositional language as aesthetic resemblance is from resemblance to things" (I, 171).[5] It is precisely what Adorno refers to as the principle of "nonidentity" that allots to art this peculiar privilege:

> Inherently every artwork desires identity with itself, an identity that in empirical reality is violently forced on all objects as identity with the subject and thus travestied. Aesthetic identity seeks to aid the nonidentical, which in reality is repressed by reality's compulsion to identify. Only by virtue of separation from empirical reality, which sanctions art to model the relation of the whole and the

> part according to the work's own need, does the artwork achieve a heightened order of existence. (*Aesthetic Theory* 4)

Even experimental forms that challenge traditional genres, or traditional disciplinary boundaries—as is the case with much historiographic fiction—are recognizable owing to certain considerations of form that are closely imbricated with content. Marcuse insists that "a work of art is authentic or true not by virtue of its content (i.e., the 'correct' representation of social conditions) nor by its 'pure' form, but by the content having become form" (*Aesthetic Dimension* 8). Although it may be true that the aesthetic is inherent not only in form but in ways of reading that uncover its operations as essential to content, to seek precise correspondences between content and form is to succumb to another sort of fantasy of transparency in service of the sociopolitical. To stop at the historical-biographical significance of the novel is to cheat ourselves of the intelligence available from attention to stylistics and form; to engineer a contrived correspondence between sociohistorical significance and the text's formal elements, however, is to miss the point of the uncontainable transformation of content becoming form, or that of the ways in which intention is extinguished in the content (Adorno, *Notes to Literature,* I, 161). Attention to the conjunctions between the formal and thematic choices can reveal both how figuration and narration work together as well as the gaps that emerge in the process of transformation.

To propose that the unique experience of art (in this case literature) cannot be separated from its immanent law of form is not to subscribe to formalism as we traditionally understand it. Although devotees of "close reading" and formalism come in many guises, a certain sort of formalism understood by what Murray Krieger has referred to as "a very narrow definition" that "equated formalism with aestheticisim as a doctrine which would cut the art object off from the world while treating only its craftsmanlike quality as an artifact" has been all but totally discredited (96).[6] New formalisms have by now succeeded new criticism's early expression of interest in form. Krieger himself relates formalist

aestheticism to a philosophical aesthesis or "immediate sense perception" (97). Immobilization of the principle of aesthesia, in the classic sense of "the capacity for feeling and sensation," prevents us from recognizing the artistic object as an "intentional object" (Krieger 97). Krieger's useful discussion of the intentional object as aesthetic would seem to sound a timely tocsin as the dangers of conflating mimetic as real grow in the reading of postcolonial literature. Krieger insists that "the peculiar nature of the intentional object as aesthetic—whatever else it is—is surely duplicitous" (101). To be blind to our own collusion in the process of taking "the mimetic *as* real" is to deny the extent to which the intentional object, here Krieger refers explicitly to drama, "wants us to be alive to this doubleness" (101).

Herbert Marcuse has argued in *The Aesthetic Dimension* that "literature is not revolutionary because it is written for the working class or for 'the revolution'"; rather it is revolutionary, as, "in a meaningful sense only with reference to itself, as *content having become form*" (xii; emphasis mine). Part of Mistry's novel's innate structure is polyglossia, linguistic and otherwise. The novel's "serious flaw," then, is precisely what points us in the direction of what I have earlier referred to, *pace* Adorno's view of philosophy, as the Sisyphean labor of interpretation. Robert Scholes had reminded us almost a quarter of a century ago in *Structuralism in Literature* that "there is no single 'right' reading for any complex literary work" but that readings are "more or less rich" (144–45). It is not "multiple readings," however, that are indicated by the concept in my reading of the novel, so much as polyglossia as a constitutive structural principle in the work, and of that play between sign and signification that Benjamin describes as the "foreignness of languages" (75). Moreover, if each language is an entire culture, as Upamanyu Chatterjee suggests in *English, August* , the *métissage* of language(s) in Mistry's novel reveals a material context that has itself been creolized and rendered considerably more complex than any one model or interpretive grid alone can explain. In fact, if in the current moment Mistry's is a diasporic tale in the West, in a precolonial context, that of the Noble family is a continuation of an older diaspora, dating back 1300 years to the expulsion of Zoroastrians from Persia at the time of the Arab invasion when a handful fled to India and were given sanctuary by Yadav Rana. As a persistently unintegrated minority

with a millennial residence in the subcontinent, the Parsi fragment of the Indian nation is also a minor fragment of world history, scattered by a much older colonial order that Islamized the Zoroastrian lands of Persia in its own bid to globalize.

The slow accretion of complexities that have resulted over the course of a long and tumultuous, often contested past in the history of the cultures described in the novel should render futile any simple recovery of an underlying and suspiciously serviceable teleological structure. Although a formalistic reading of the text may reveal the technics of textual design, the novel as a social text cannot be reduced to a puzzle that must be pieced together to yield a serviceable and representative profile of the cultures that form its subject, unless we are willing to concede, with Adorno, that "this puzzle is constituted in such a fashion that it remains a vexation" (*Aesthetic Theory* 121). To confuse the novel's particular rendition of human suffering with the representatively aggregate condition of the postcolony is to fall prey to the oldest of colonial fallacies, one that Memmi refers to as "the mark of the plural": "The colonized is never characterized in an individual manner; he is entitled only to drown in an anonymous collectivity ('They are this.' 'They are all the same.')" (85).[7] If "this" can only happen in India, if "this" is how "they" are, the postcolonial can never be other than an amorphous other serving dubious needs and anxieties in those with the power to name and judge, creating an aggregare object "riddled," as Benjamin puts it, "with error with *doxa* [conjecture]" (*Charles Baudelaire* 103). Sybil Steinberg's review of *Such a Long Journey* captures the spirit of this exchange in a metaphor celebrating the consumption model; the novel, she notes approvingly, "serves up an exotic feast" (66). The reception of the text constitutes something of its context, but it is scarcely the constitutive content of literature. Adorno specifically castigates that form of commodity consumption that uses art as target practice for subjective projections, whether they are sentimental identifications or disdainful ones:

> Insofar as the now typical attitude makes the artwork something merely factual, *even art's mimetic element, itself*

> *incompatible with whatever is purely a thing, is bartered off as a commodity.* The consumer arbitrarily projects his impulses —mimetic remnants—on whatever is presented to him. . . . As a tabula rasa of subjective projections . . . the artwork is shorn of its qualitative dimension. . . . What the reified artworks are no longer able to say is replaced by the beholder with the standardized echo of himself, to which he hearkens. (*Aesthetic Theory* 17; emphasis mine)

If the economy of the culture industry permits art to be treated as "merely factual," in the alternative economy of art and literature, the distilled model of the phenomenal world carries analogies and resonances, not dutifully representative reductions or unmediated reflections of the real world. The capacity for aesthetic sublimation, moreover, is hardly confined to poetry and drama alone; "The realistic novel," too, as Marcuse insists, "must transform the reality which is their material in order to re-present its essence as envisioned by art" (*Aesthetic Dimension* 44). Mimesis, within this economy, "is representation through estrangement, subversion of consciousness" (45). For Adorno, mimesis affords an alternative form of knowledge, representing an attempt to approximate nature and that which is not there—a notion intimately tied to the prospect of utopian thinking.

The revolutionary potential of art resides in this alternative economy, itself suspended in a geopolitical economic context that both enables and restricts it. If anything, Marcuse proposes that it is the aesthetic experience that is capable of "breaking through the mystified (and petrified) social reality, and opening the horizon of change (liberation)" through "its invocation of the beautiful image *(schöner Schein)* of liberation" (xi, 6). "The only requirement" for a "historical reality" to challenge the world, Marcuse maintains, is

that "it must be *stylized,* subjected to aesthetic 'formation'" (44). If it is at all possible to talk about utopia in *Such a Long Journey,* it is so not because Mistry's portrait of middle-class Parsi family life in 1960s and 1970s Bombay alludes to it in the characters' conversations or narratorial asides, but precisely because the miniaturized world of the novel, operating within a mode we recognize as realism, has undergone a process of *form*ation. Language is thus "tightened or loosened, forced to yield insights otherwise obscured" while "restructuring takes place through concentration, exaggeration, emphasis on the essential, reordering of facts" (Marcuse, *Aesthetic Dimension* 45). Its order and its language operate within the work as a whole to carry the import of aesthetic transformation. If this process "turns into indictment," it also becomes "a celebration of that which resists injustice and terror, and of that which can still be saved" (45). Art's treatment of utopia is scarcely confined to content alone. Indeed, at the level of literary plot resolution, the triumph of liberation would seem to serve as little more than hollow promise. The fracturing of the image of liberation by reality remains one of art's more potent means of indicting that reality. In the alembic of content having become form, the image of liberation surfaces not as a politically correct vision, but one that can only be politically correct if "it is also correct," as Benjamin insists, "by literary standards" (quoted in Marcuse, *Aesthetic Dimension* 53). One might argue that the vision may actually bypass the arena of praxis altogether, thereby remaining inaccessible to it, but nevertheless calling praxis up and into question. The very possibility of conjuring up this image of liberation, as transgressive of the known reality, thus lies in its inadequation to this reality.

In the reading that follows, I will pay particular attention to the novel's use of walls and journeys, literal and metaphorical, personal and collective, cognitive and spiritual, as they function within the economy of the text. These figurative devices manage the burden of content in the book, organizing mimesis and diegesis into an interactive whole. Girded by an elaborate formal structure, the novel is organized such that its cosmos (etymologically, "adornment" in Greek, a connotation tied to aesthetics) perforce recalls the absence of order in the world without. The tight construction of the novel, tying in various motifs—of journeys begun and ended, undertaken and delayed,

mourned and celebrated and of the many types of walls that protect even as they limit—overworks the principle of order, recalling in every plot resolution all that is left unreconciled in reality. The stuff of the poetic is lodged in the disadequation between this "ordered" world and that reified world which is administered but lacks the symmetries and resolutions that would reconcile it with truth and nature. The political import of the text's allegorical construction of the problem of utopia lies precisely within the purview of its aesthetic dimension rather than in its availability as a portable program for change. In the aesthetic dimension it becomes possible to allude to the possibility of a vision neither conceivable nor understood in the language of a world dominated by the rule of equivalence.

Such a Long Journey's traffic with the problem of utopia begins with its framing troika of epigraphs. The lament for a world gone wrong, the flickering hope of redemption, and the longing for a new language, a different set of tracks, and "a new country. . . revealed with its wonders" are signaled in three epigraphs that draw upon Firdausi's *Shah-Nama,* T. S. Eliot's "The Journey of the Magi," and Tagore's *Gitanjali.* The aged priests of Firdausi's *Shah-Nama* are asked, "How did they [the kings who had once possessed the world] . . . hold the world in the beginning, and why is it that it has been left to us in such a sorry state?" Sounding an age-old requiem on a familiar *ubi sunt* note, the question hovers over the tale of journeys to follow, issuing from an anonymous "he" who assembles the priests and invites their narrative response. The next epigraph, from "The Journey of the Magi," seems to float into view as a solemn response: "A cold coming we had of it, / Just the worst time of the year / For a journey, and such a long journey. . ." The calculated ellipsis inserted at the end of the line bespeaks a narrative that continues, but one that must be syncopated to leave the sound and sense of journey lingering without further explanation. The final epigraph ends on a hopeful note: "And when old words die out on the tongue, new / melodies break forth from the heart; and where the / old tracks are lost, new country is revealed with its wonders." A relentless will to hope for a better prospect than one yet seen seems to prevail, one nevertheless full of cautions against an old language and a recourse to old paths that have yet to lead to the "new country." Pregnant with nostalgia for an unknown past gone by and a

future-oriented longing for what is yet to be understood in the old language or arrived at through familiar tracks, the first and last epigraphs straddle, amphimacer-like, the visually shorter middle epigraph with its promise of a narrative accounting "a journey, and such a long journey. . . ." and the difficulties indicated in "a cold coming." The phrase "such a long journey," plucked out to serve as the title of the novel, looms into view as one turns the page, braced by the framing text no longer in sight. Encapsulated cryptically in the very title, then, is the notion of utopia, "no-place," the move toward which will be "such a long journey" because it is not only that the end is nowhere in sight but that the destination itself is unknown, the language of its melodies not yet understood in the old lexicon, and the old tracks have yet to be abandoned.

The novel's formal rendition of these thematic concerns labors to resonate with the dialectic between old and new, progress and regress, journeys and ends. Selected figurative elements in *Such a Long Journey* expose this dialectic in a macroscopic view of the text as whole. Mistry's use of the figures of allegory (including national allegory, one admits) in the journey motif, symbolism in the references to the black paper on the windows and in the references to insects, and the triangulated metaphor-symbol-metonymy in the recurrent references to "the black stone wall" exploit the resources of figurative language not so much to approximate significance to signification as to strain through the tension between them. The novel's fundamental and delimiting "problem" with language thus rests at the heart of various sorts of incommensurability: between art and its object of representation; between a reconciled nature and its message of liberation; between content and the content having become form; between enunciation and understanding; between the singular and the typical.

The politics of representation makes the example exemplary, the representation representative. In this dominant scheme, postcolonial literature cannot be credited with singularity even as the area-based "knowledge" produced in postcolonial literature is forever barred from access to universality. The geopolitical division of knowledge confines the post-colonial production to parochialism while pronouncing universal appeal for writers like Joyce and Proust. One might certainly argue that *Such a Long*

Journey is exemplary of prototypical postcolonial concerns in many ways. It is parochial in that it is interested in a small part of the world, and a part that does not feature as globally "central." It is representative of the postcolonial condition in that it situates itself in the aftermath of a complicated colonial takeover with a conflicted legacy in which the battle between tradition and modernity constitutes a driving motif. Its choice of the novel genre, its recourse to the realist mode of telling, and even its predictable use of figuration betray this legacy as much as its content. If we pursued the narrative thread provided by Mistry's repeated return to the wall, for instance, we would find a useful broadly aesthetic and architectonic device for the exposition of what we have come to think of as paradigmatically postcolonial thematic concerns: the nation and its fragments, postcolonial disillusionment, the transformation of a physical and mental landscape by the techonology and ideology of colonialism. We would also find, however, a symbolic internal system that exceeds these purposes, obliging us to conceive of those human concerns that are not usually allowed a spotlight on the postcolonial stage: love, loss, the individual libidinal psyche and its travails, the dailiness of postcolonial life that is at once bigger and more trivial than we usually credit, and the protest of the particular against the generic that is lodged in the inner history of the individual. At the same time, then, that the wall stands as a potent symbol of the sundering of individual experience from a total view of reality, it also points to the loss of interest in the individual in a world organized by reification and its reorganization of human relationships. Against a society that administers and manages all aspects of human life, the novel's focus on the sensuous structure of the individual's existence—a mode that might be considered outdated and outpaced by developments in the artistic marketplace—can constitute a subversive reminder of whom the dreamed-ofrevolution is for, who dreams of it and in what imperfect, fragmented ways. Plot elements that recall the postcolonial predicament are thus constantly sized and shaped by the privatization of the political and the social.

The novel begins with the protagonist, Gustad Noble, facing eastward to offer his orisons to Ahura Mazda. The early invocation of religious filiation will continue throughout the novel to undercut affiliation with the national narrative on various levels:

in the relationship of the subject to the nation-state and of religious minority to majority. As yet, however, the world invoked in the first few pages is sealed off from these realities, its dimensions reduced to a compound shared exclusively by Parsi families who coexist with varying degrees of harmony. The sounds one hears are those of pots and pans clattering in neighborhood flats, of birds chirping in the compound's solitary tree, the noise of the world without yet to intrude. As the narrative focus shifts further into a progressively interior spatial dimension, the heterodiegetic narrator takes the reader into Gustad Noble's psychic world where some of his disappointments and his hopes, his fears and desires briefly unfold. The narrative focus zooms in and out through these differently sheltered and confined spaces, revealing the primary denizens of Khodadad Building, a Parsi enclave shielded from the noise and dust of a busy thoroughfare and the prying eyes of "nons" by a black stone wall. Behind the stone wall surrounding Khodadad building live some of the characters who will play major and minor, noble and ignoble roles in the story. The Noble family includes Gustad's superstitious wife Dilnavaz and their three children: the brilliant older son Sohrab, fifteen-year-old Darius, and a young daughter, Roshan. Sohrab is clearly the repository of Gustad's hopes and aspirations, his own having been destroyed when Gustad's father was forced into bankruptcy and Gustad into early employment at a bank. Gustad's outraged surprise when Sohrab secures and then rejects a coveted seat to study at the Indian Institute of Technology—"the promised land"—creates a devastating rift between father and son, providing one of the plot's dramatic tensions in the novel (67). With the onset of his daughter's lingering illness, Sohrab's unexpected change of plans, and his friend Major Jimmy Bilimoria's audacious request for help with transferring government funds, Gustad's relatively safe world behind the wall is about to be rocked by fear and uncertainty.

Sharing the compound with the Noble family, among other minor characters, is the elderly Miss Kutpitia who claims to know of the medicinal properties of herbs, of black and white magic, and of the import of auguries; Mr. Rabadi, engaged in an ongoing feud with the Nobles over their son Darius's interest in his daughter; Major Jimmy Bilimoria, the retired major who has gone missing for a year only to reappear in Gustad's life in the form of a

mysterious note that draws the latter into the seamy politics of Indira Gandhi's ambitions; and lame and dimwitted Tehmul who will die in the riots staged around the wall at the conclusion of the novel. Beyond this wall is a frightening world in which the proverbial heat and dust of India and the smelly effluences of its anonymous masses assail the senses; where the fundamentalist Shiv Sena is busy renaming city streets and staging a bid for a unitarian Marathi Bombay (known, as of even date, as Mumbai); where suspicious women eye Gustad's shopping basket askance, lest it contain offensive nonvegetarian victuals. Beyond this wall, too, is a world of political intrigue and government corruption Gustad will learn of through bitter experience.

Functioning alternately as symbol, metonymic sign, and pregnant metaphor, the wall does not stand (or fall, as it does in the end) for any simple correlative meaning. A spatial construct, it is the site of projection, of limit, of boundaries that invite convergence with cognitive and psychological parallels while also discouraging literal parallelism. The limit space of the wall functions as a central device in the novel with multiple significations, among them are the symbolic limits of representation in the national and minority narrative, a visual symbol of the internal religious and social divisions within the nation, a metonymic pointer to the threatening excess that lies beyond, on either side, and the wall as a freighted metaphor that unfolds in various ways. Gustad's repeated return to meditate on the wall, the role of the wall in the collective and personal drama that unfolds, and the problems and protections posed by the wall make it integral to the narrative of the novel. In a critical sense, then, although sometimes a wall is just a wall, here we are faced with a *story* wall, a wall in a story, an intentional wall, a wall beyond auctorial intention, and a wall with a story.

At the time of our introduction to it in the first chapter, the wall is already under attack. Gustad has just received a municipality notice suggesting that a road-widening project is likely to push it back several feet:

> The compound would shrink to less than half its present width, and the black stone

> wall would loom like a mountain before the ground-floor tenants. More a prison camp than a building, all cooped up like sheep or chickens. With the road noise and nuisance so much closer. The flies, the mosquitoes, the horrible stink, with bloody shameless people pissing, squatting alongside the wall. Late at night it became like a wholesale public latrine. (16)

The intrusions of the world beyond have been suggested earlier in the introductory chapter through Gustad's growing apprehension of it through smell and sound. Engrossed in his prayers despite the familiar clatter and chirping, Gustad is beginning his recital of the Sarosh Baaj silently "when the domestic sounds of the building were drowned by the roar of a diesel engine" (15). The "thundering lorry" pulls away shortly after, "leaving a cloud of diesel fumes to linger at the gate." "By and by," we learn, "the morning air carried in the acrid smell" (15). It is this smell that draws Gustad to the gate and to the municipal notice pasted on a pillar, proposing the road widening. The municipality's project is inextricably associated with the disturbing sounds and smells of a threatening world, its plans for modernization including an expansion as well as closing in. We might read within these conjunctions the arraignment of a selective and disjunctive interpretation of modernization that renders the idea of "progress" necessarily conflicted. Like a sheet that will not stretch to cover all that seek its warmth and shelter, it is extended in one direction, only to rob others of its protection. The contradictory projects of modernity are partially visible through the struggles over the wall in Mistry's narrative. Interestingly, the movement of the wall is more or less irrelevant for the majority of the people. The road widening benefits the common man but little. If the foul assaults on the wall by a citizenry bereft of public facilities is a continuing

source of annoyance to Gustad, it is also a dismal reminder of those who are kept out of the city's protected enclaves, obliged to perform even their private ablutions in public. Statistics suggest that nationwide about 70 percent of the population has no access to sanitation (www.loksatta.org). The mass concentration of populations in the major cities renders this problem far more visible than it would be in the rural areas. The bodily deposits of this hapless population at the wall bespeak this abjection, defiantly so.

The city, one recalls, is the locus classicus of modernity. Its spaces under contest, its time is regulated by the workday—Gustad associates the air raid siren with the thought that it was "Ten o'clock already . . . Should have been at my desk by now" and its spaces are regulated by division of labor (143). Its size capable of "[absorbing] a highly diverse variety of services," the city also encourages specialization and adaptability to consumer needs (Simmel 420). Gustad's description of the neighborhood in which his physician's, Dr. Paymaster, dispensary is located, suggests the sprouting of these goods and services as the area is transformed to offer "transistors, toasters, tyres, auto parts, plastic crockery—everything essential for the magic which swallows up a hundred years of history and propels a country stuck in the nineteenth century directly into the glories of the twentieth" (154). Gustad's negotiations with the metropolis introduce us to its teeming variety, its diversity regulated and unified by nothing more than the money economy that has created the city, its assault on the senses relentless.

Denial and the blocking out of sensory stimuli, we might recall, was offered as a classic psychological response to the sensory overload of an overpopulated, underserviced city in Georg Simmel's comments on the problems of modern urban life in "The Metropolis and Mental Life." Challenged spatially from forming a community on this large a scale, self-preservation demands from the individual the ability to close out and seek shelter from the random and relentless profusion of stimulants of city life. Reserve stems not only from indifference but a revulsion that Simmel describes as "mutual strangeness and revulsion," which is likely, moreover, to "break into hatred and fight at the moment of closer contact, however caused" (415–16) as they do toward the end of the novel when "spontaneous emotions, bottled up for God knows

how long . . . [pop] their corks" in a spirited demonstration against the city's municipal corporation (Mistry 329). From Gustad's perspective, the wall offers a retreat from the maelstrom of a burgeoning and hostile metropolis seeking to reorganize the space of the city in the name of development or in the majoritarian quest for a univocal identity by replacing colonial street names with nationalist ones (74). Written over by the bodily effluences of the "bloody shameless people," the wall is unsurprisingly illegible to Gustad as a sign of one of many problems that neither the nation-state nor the ordinary bourgeois individual has been able to confront meaningfully.

If the black stone wall thus "stands" for various sorts of internal boundaries within the nation, it also embodies the self-sought isolation of the Noble family and by extension that of both the Parsi community and others like them who live within their relatively safer enclosures, blind to the deprivation in the world beyond—notwithstanding Gustad's occasional acts of compassion for the poor and otherwise deprived—and the way in which modernity shapes their space and time as well as their individual psyches. The stink of the unsavory realities of a world held temporarily at bay, however, pursues Gustad as the diesel smell persists, "following him through the compound as he returned home" (16). A powerful mnemonic, it joins his consciousness of the current dilemma with two unpleasant memories: one of the bailiff's men driving away with the contents of his father's bankrupted bookshop in their lorries, and the other of an accident nine years ago that has left him with a limp. As he walks back into his flat, his hip beginning to hurt, Gustad wrinkles his nose and wishes "the wind would change" (17).

The accident, we will learn, is caused when Gustad and his son are forced to leap off a city bus by a surly conductor who informs them that the bus is not headed toward their destination and that they must either get off in the middle of traffic or buy a ticket. "No free ride," proclaims this denizen of a money economy (57). The hitherto stationary bus in the middle of sluggish traffic jerks forward just as they are alighting, and Gustad suffers the fall that will leave him limping as he kicks his son out of the way of an oncoming taxi. We are told that "the smell of diesel fumes was strong in his nostrils as he blacked out' (58). As he comes to in the street, a water-seller is demanding money for the water used to

splash on his face, incurring the ire of some who find him heartless and the support of those who understand that it is unfair that he should be "left out" of the profits that the doctor and the hospital would not relinquish in the name of humanity. "They [the residents of the city] share," as Simmel points out, "a matter-of-fact attitude in dealing with men and with things; and, in this attitude, a formal justice is often coupled with an inconsiderate hardness" (411). As his son Sohrab hands over a rupee to the water-seller, Gustad himself "wanted to say something to him about counting the change carefully" (*Such a Long Journey* 59). Spawning an ever greater "right to distrust which men have in the face of the touch-and-go elements of modern life," the city both requires and is produced by an internalization of the money economy and a concomitant blunting of discriminative capacities of the relative value of things (Simmel 415). The only individual who does not want "to profit from . . . [Gustad's] pain" is the taxi-driver who drives him home and then to the traditional bonesetter for free (*Such a Long Journey* 60). But then, again, he will turn out to be in the employ of Jimmy Bilimoria and the Indian Secret Service and capable of considerable ruthlessness when Gustad hesitates to perform Bilimoria's requested monetary transactions. Although the "internalization of the money economy" can scarcely be confined to urban life alone—the rampant and exploitative practice of usury in Indian villages can hardly have been without consequence for the structuring of social relations, for instance—the city as the seat of the money economy may well provide the first such model of a commercial relation of the individual to the life around him by virtue of size and scale. The instinct to seek refuge from the ravages of metropolitan life and its production of one-dimensional subjectivity progressively isolates the individual. The prospect of greater proximity to the chaos without and the impending "exposure" to its ugly realities lead Gustad to hope that nothing will come of the "pernicious proposition" to reduce the buffer zone provided by the wall further (90).

In a bid to protect the wall from human soiling, Gustad hits upon the brilliant solution of getting a sidewalk artist to fill the wall with holy pictures. "Will you be able to draw enough to cover three hundred feet?" he asks the young artist. Gustad's attempt to develop an indigenous, not to mention ingenious solution, to deal with the insalubrious assaults on the wall make it an experimental

field for the kind of autoplasty needed to heal the wounds of fundamentalist politics that have appropriated nationalist discourse in India. His reply suggests the lie not only of any unitary discourse of the Indian nation, but even of a Hindu one: "There is no difficulty. I can cover three hundred miles if necessary. Using assorted religions and their gods, saints and prophets: Hindu, Sikh, Judaic, Christian, Muslim, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, Jainist. Actually, Hinduism alone can provide enough" (182). The proliferation not only of alternative emblems of cultural presence but of the central emblems of a Hindu one suggest the impossibility of any essentialist notion of nation, fundamentalist or otherwise. That these proliferations are themselves located on the border space of the wall should alert us to its status as the limit site of cultural representation where nation-space is in the "*process* of the articulation of elements: where meanings may be partial because they are *in media res;* and history may be half-made because it is in the process of being made; and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly, in the act of 'composing' its powerful image" (Bhabha, "Introduction" 3). The evolution of religious fundamentalism in India as deeply complicit with modernity rather than as a simple foil to it is discussed at length in the following chapter. For now, suffice it to register its presence in the narrative through the ambivalent sign of the wall.

In Mistry's tale of a Parsi family, if the wall interrupts the narrative of a continuous nation by revealing its disruptive other, it is also presented as a possibility of sorts. Over time, the wall "had verily become a shrine for all races and religions" (286). On the wall the Hindu trinity jostles with Abraham, Zarathushtra, Our Lady of Fatima, major and minor Christian saints pantheon, Yellamma, the patron deity of prostitutes, and even a few dubious holy men. The subsequent evolution of the wall from public latrine to sacred shrine for a disparate band of devotees is pronounced a miracle by those who have so long suffered a heady assault of undesirable sights and smells. There are complaints, to be sure, about the "all *perjaat* gods on a Parsi Zarathosti building wall," but they are dwarfed by the miracle of "smell . . . gone, nuisance gone, mosquitoes gone" (213). The smell of incense and joss sticks mingled with the "heavenly fragrances" of roses and lilies now continuously fills the air as devotees of various faiths and religions

stop to offer their orisons and their scented offerings. “What an amazing contrast,” Gustad thinks, “to the wall of old. Instead of flies and mosquitoes buzzing, a thousand colours dancing in the sunlight. Instead of the stink, this glorious fragrance of paradise. Heaven on earth” (286). It is not incidental that Gustad so often and so fondly remembers a period in his life when he was part of “a wonderful world” in his father’s furniture workshop and bookstore, “where even the air had a special quality”: “Time and the world stretched endlessly then, before the bad days came and everything shrank,” and one might add, would also begin, quite literally, to stink (141). The transformed wall literalizes the plugging of these stimuli and the pleasing separation and freedom this grants to the community within its confines. The aesthetically appealing wall then provides a dramatic symbol of hindrance to the reciprocal interaction of the various elements that only speciously comprise a “society,” because “the bodily proximity and narrowness of space makes the mental distance only the more visible” (Simmel 418).

The reliance of this solution on the mystifying force of religion and art, moreover, betrays a habitual evasion of other fundamental divides. The powers of religious ideology and art combine to provide the Khodadad building Parsis with the buffer they have so long desired, but they do so by masking and aestheticizing the nature of the various divides. The common person’s needs are merely displaced by these diversions, for one imagines that another wall somewhere is now serving the purpose thus far performed by the black stone wall, one unadorned and naked in its grim testimonial to a failure to meet the needs of the masses. Sacralized with dizzying speed through the tireless efforts of Gustad’s hired artist, the wall, a shrine to secularism and religious pluralism and a certain sort of bourgeois utopian possibility proves, perhaps predictably, to be a fragile bulwark. As the novel ends, municipal workers are chiseling out the mortar between the stone slabs after a bloody confrontation with a spirited, multireligious group of protesters. In the violent confrontation, the disabled half-wit Tehmul, who was foolish enough to leave the protection of the compound, has been fatally wounded, an unwitting sacrifice.

In the heat of intramarginal politics and the hegemonic designs of the nation-state and the enthusiasm for development, even the

sacred is no longer sacred. The sacred wall's ultimately multiple failure to resolve the problems that beset those on both sides of the wall suggests the mortifying limits of both secularism and aesthetic representations of tolerance in the face of unaddressed social needs. Neither is adequately equipped to face the onslaught of modernization, its unequal distribution of resources, and its new challenges to old problems of social and religious divisions. Nor, indeed, is religious commitment a bulwark against the more "modern" of devotions displayed by the denizens of the city: it is scarcely a matter of random chance that Laxmi, Hindu goddess of wealth, is the first to be recognized and garners the first of the many devoted offerings that will appear at the wall. Alongside the more traditional gods on the pantheon, we are told, is Parsi holy man Dustoorji Baria who is famous for helping people not only "with health problems, pet problems," but also "stock-market problems, business-partnership problems, job-finding problems, merchant-banker problems . . . and so on" (288). The wall then comes to function as a powerful mise-en-scène for a thoroughly commodified society that is both unified and divided by the same force.

The wall painter's growing pride in the power of his art is also fated to be humbled. In an ironic twist, it is Gustad's old friend Malcolm Saldanha who turns out to be in charge of the municipal operation to destroy the wall. Himself a musician who "used to summon the notes like magic" but proved unable to make a living, Malcolm is "now supervising pickaxes and churning concrete" (331). The pavement artist observes his approach with apprehension, crumpling when Malcolm breaks the news to him:

> He gathered up his paints and brushes, boxes and belongings, and dropped them in the compound. There he sat, cross-legged, unable to summon up even a trace of the resources that had fuelled his wanderings in the old days. (324)

Initially an unassuming sidewalk crayonist, the usually humble artist has not earlier been without some aspirations to social relevance. By the time the wall is slated to be destroyed, he has come to see it as “my wall” (329). A specialist in world religions and in religious art, he is quite able to generate enough representations from the Hindu pantheon to cover 300 feet of wall; “But,” he suggests, “I always like to mix them up, include a variety in my drawings. Makes me feel I am doing something to promote tolerance and understanding in the world” (182). The artist has nevertheless attempted, thus far, to cultivate a studied insouciance and humility about his work: he had learned “during his years of wandering and drawing . . . that impermanence was the one significant certainty governing his work. Whenever the vicissitudes and vagaries of street life randomly dispossessed him of his crayoned creations, forcing him to repaint or move on, he was able to do so cheerfully” (212). The success of the wall art, however, leads him to dream of greater glory for his work: “From now on, no more crayons. All pictures in oil and enamel only. Completely permanent. Nothing will spoil them” (212–13). By this point in the narrative the artist has quite forgotten a lesson he had earlier learned, “to disdain the overlong sojourn and the procrastinated departure, for they were the progenitors of complacent routine, to be shunned at all costs.” The work on the wall was “reawakening in him the usual sources of human sorrow: a yearning for permanence, for roots, for something he could call his own, something immutable” (184).

In the face of unexpected success, the artist’s desire to create an enduring, meaningful “miracle” through his work is rudely exposed as misplaced pretension when the beautiful, sacred wall proves no match for the municipality’s plans. The abrupt end to his brief moment of glory reminds him that “the journey—chanced, unplanned, solitary— was the thing to relish” (184). As the Khodadad building inhabitants’ worst fears are realized, the artist is packing away his crayons, all he will need, he says, for his journey. Gustad asks him where he is going. The artist shrugs and replies, “In a world where roadside latrines become temples, and temples and shrines become dust and ruin, does it matter where?” (338). It is not necessary to read into the pavement artist’s fate the prediction of the end of art so much as its precarious position in a larger world of uncertainty and change, its future unknown, and

its purpose ambiguous. Without even the cryptic clue of a guiding star, it is clear that the artist's quest for alternative futures, like the people's, is also going to be such a long journey.

Gustad, meanwhile, has had the opportunity to come to his own bitter conclusion that "nothing is beyond the government. Ordinary people like us are helpless against them" (338). Standing against the mobility signified by the dominant motif of "journey," the wall also operates as a counter to change, national or personal, public or private. The protagonist, thus, also erects walls against experience and change; he refuses, in other words, to make a necessary journey for much of the novel. Gustad's embittered awakening at the conclusion of the novel has come at considerable cost, and it is one that follows upon a literal train journey to the country's capital. Early in the novel an animated exchange between Sohrab and his father suggests the latter's staunch unwillingness to countenance stories of governmental corruption. As Gustad is dragged into Major Bilimoria's scheme for siphoning money into an illegal account, ostensibly to aid the revolutionary Bangladeshi Mukti Bahini army in its war for liberation from Pakistan, sinister aspects of statecraft and political ambition begin to reveal themselves. Mistry's use of this story line is based largely on a historical event involving a Parsi agent from RAW, a branch of the Indian Secret Service. Arun Mukherjee explains that

> The actual event that Mistry focused on is known in India as the Nagarwala case. In the winter of 1971, it was reported in the papers the Head Cashier of the State Bank of India in Delhi had given six million rupees to Mr. Nagarwala on the basis of a phone call from Mrs. Gandhi who, he claimed, had asked him to take this great risk in the name of Mother India. After he had delivered the case to Mr. Nagarwala in a preassigned place, the Head Clerk

> had doubts about his act and went to the police. Mrs. Gandhi denied that she had made any such telephone call and the Head Clerk was suspended. Nagarwala was arrested a few days later and confessed that he had mimicked Mrs. Gandhi's voice. (145–46)

The novel recounts a similar tale, with Major Bilimoria playing the fictional role of Nagarwala. Gustad's growing misgivings about the state's capacity for terrorizing the private individual develop into horror in a final confession scene in a Delhi prison hospital where Bilimoria is being held. The enfeebled Bilimoria's halting revelation of his manipulation by the prime minister and his progressive physical and mental decline after police torture leave Gustad in no doubt that the corruption they have all taken for granted as a part of Indian life exists at a level that confounds belief. Bilimoria himself knows that it is bootless to talk to lawyers or newspapers, since "everything is in their control." His own plan is to weather his four-year prison sentence and "then forget about it" (280). By the time Gustad returns to Bombay after what will turn out to be his last meeting with his friend, India is openly at war with Pakistan over the very liberation movement in Bangladesh Gustad had mistakenly thought he was aiding when he agreed to divert government funds.

Gustad's reconciliation with Bilimoria leaves him in good spirits, but not yet shorn of all his illusions. His nationalistic zeal, his pride in the Indian army betray an unchanged faith in the power of the nation-state to protect its citizens as he extols the might of Indian antiaircraft guns and patriotically repairs the blackout paper on his windows, first affixed nine years earlier, during a by now almost forgotten war with China in 1962. Gustad's wife's pleas to remove the old paper have long fallen on deaf ears. "Long after the 1971 war with Pakistan has been won," the narrator observes, "after the euphoria of flags, banners, and victory parades had passed . . . after the billboards and hoardings

were divested of wartime exhortations; after the blackout was lifted and cities returned to light . . . after all this, Gustad still did not remove the paper from his windows" (309–10). The insistent use of anaphora in a paragraph-long preamble to the final sentence with which the above quotation ends impresses upon us Gustad's inability to make a final, necessary gesture. He seems to sense that it is time to make this move, but finds it difficult to overcome his reluctance.

Although he dismisses Dilnavaz's renewed petition to remove the paper with a brusque, "Why the big rush?" Gustad finds that her "gibe about the blackout paper was buzzing inside his head.""By and by, however," the narrator notes, "the wall's fragrances wrapped their rich veils over him and made him forget" (310). What is sweet to the senses can also numb them into complacence. Aesthesia, the capacity for feeling and sensation, may be vital to an intelligent understanding of the complexity of human and economic relations and indispensable as a tool for human liberation, but it is no guarantor of it or of personal emancipation. Gustad finds himself all too easily beguiled away from his personal journey by the lulling scents, and all too susceptible shortly after to "moving stories of how Bangladeshis had cheered the arrival of the first Indian troops in Dacca" (310). As he pores over the newspapers over the next few days, "like everyone else, Gustad had begun to feel the glow of national pride." A smaller item in "an obscure corner" of the paper one day jolts him back to his senses: "When he read it, the glow of national pride dropped from him like a wet raincoat." The item in question is a small paragraph "which stated that Mr. J. Bilimoria, a former officer with RAW, had died of a heart attack while serving his four-year prison sentence in New Delhi" (311). Incidentally, Nagarwala, Bilimoria's real-life counterpart, is also said to have died under suspicious circumstances.

The other notice in the paper is one that alerts Gustad to his friend's funeral at the Tower of Silence. Grateful that some unknown person has brought Jimmy's body from Delhi, Gustad joins him, part of the way, on his final journey up the hill to the tower, where scavenging birds can reduce the body to bones. Despite his grief and rage, Gustad is glad to "watch the fire, listen to his prayers. And to offer sandalwood, sprinkle *loban* in the *afargan.*" In the scene now focalized through Gustad's senses, a

powerful synesthesia is orchestrated: “Powder bursting intro fragrant flames. Like shining from shook foil. Frankincense and myrrh, and sandalwood glowing red. Colour of the rising sun. And Jimmy’s face through the thick white smoke” (315). The oblique reference back to one of the framing epigraphs from “The Journey of the Magi” in the evocation of the scented offerings to the funereal fire recalls Eliot’s description of a journey that retains a final, unsettled paradox:

> This set down
> This: were we led all that way for
> Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
> We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
> But had thought they were different; this Birth was
> Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.

It is believed that the magi were Zoroastrian priests and that the sign in the heavens had been long prophesied. This time, however, frankincense and myrrh are unambiguously offerings to death, their red glow in the fire nevertheless suggesting, even if they cannot promise, the “colour of the rising sun” and another birth so long ago and such a long journey made for the occasion. Both birth and death lie at the conclusion of the original expedition referred to by Eliot, the redemption of mankind necessitating the crucifixion, its collective rebirth requiring this death. Whether there is any prospect of redemption in the death Gustad now grieves, however, is impossible to discern through the fragrant but obscuring veil of smoke. That it is impossible to return unsullied by the terrible knowledge embodied in his friend Bilimoria’s death might be deduced from the words that follow in Eliot’s poem,

suggesting that they and we can be “no longer at ease . . . in the old dispensation.”

Gustad returns home to the novel’s closing scene in which the wall will be destroyed, the artist will set off on his unending journey, and another journey will end as Tehmul loses his life to a stray brick thrown by protestors. The cement mixers, waiting lorries, the milling crowd around the wall, and Tehmul’s uncontrollable babble quickly apprise Gustad upon his arrival at the scene: “For the briefest of moments he felt the impending loss cut deeply, through memory and time; the collapse of the wall would wreck the past and the future” (329). As the raging mob vents its fury on construction workers formidably armed with pickaxes and crowbars, the frightened Parsis watch from within the compound, while Gustad attempts to keep Tehmul away from the fascinating flying objects without. Before he realizes it, however, Tehmul slips away, to be caught on the forehead by a flying brick. Gustad rushes into the melée to grab the unconscious frame and drag it into the compound. The doctor’s ministrations come too late. As the others ponder where to put the body for the hour or so it will take for the hearse to arrive, Gustad silently approaches the body, lifts it in his arms and bears it safely home, two floors up to his flat. This sacred task done, Gustad begins his prayers for the unfortunate orphan. What strange redemption there is in the crippled boy’s death, what gain in this tragic loss, it is not clear, but with the prayers tears long held within begin to flow. Gustad turns from his prayers to find that his son Sohrab, who has been visiting his mother, has joined him in Tehmul’s flat. Whether or not their differences over Sobhrab’s choices will be resolved, some reconciliation is clear in their embrace.

Returning to the compound Gustad finds the air “rank with the smell of diesel fumes” and a nauseating stench from the barrel of sewer sludge overturned by protestors. Engulfed in the putrid odors of a world that cannot be checked in its relentless process of change and progress, Gustad will finally “come to his senses.” In a finely tuned sign of dramatic irony, the author makes a double gesture through the climactic event of the destruction of the black stone wall. While the symbolic protection of the wall is destroyed along with the literal wall, Gustad seems to begin to dismantle the metaphoric wall that exists between him and self-awareness, a gesture transferred from the events transpiring outside the home

to the darkness of his flat where he starts to remove from the windows—as his family has bootlessly been urging him—the black paper he had affixed several years earlier. As Gustad pulls at "the paper covering the ventilators," it is not only the light beyond that is let in, however, but the heat of "the sun-flooded compound" (339). Gustad's inevitable journey out of his protected retreat into the open, if threatening, spaces of shocks and experience is masterfully captured in the double signification of this culminative moment. This delayed figurative rendition dramatizes the cognitive lag between experience and its apprehension; Gustad has long before now been ejected out of his protected Parsi enclave into the full fray of national politics, but his confrontation with the import of his experiences is perforce linked thematically and figuratively in the ending.

But not so fast. For all the walls that tumble, some yet remain. Gustad may have confronted his illusions about the state's power and corruption; he may have understood the basis of his separation from his son, but this adult bildungsroman ends with a limited epiphany after all. It is unclear how Gustad intends to reconcile his hopes for Sohrab's future as the technologically sophisticated heir to Indian modernity with the latter's interest in the arts. Moreover, notwithstanding the powerful symbolism of the light flooding in after the removal of the black paper, there is little evidence that Gustad has connected meaningfully with the reality of those who remain identified in his mind with a "horrible stink." Till this noble hero learns to develop a nose for the sources of inequality and injustice that have created walls around and between people, his coming of age should be construed more as a point of departure than arrival.

The content-form vinculum in the use of the wall as a figurative device clarifies the ways in which the novel is in a fundamental sense about walls of various kinds. Given the comments from reviewers with which this chapter began, it might be instructive to now pursue this line of inquiry with specific regard to the question of language. Mistry's use of English might be characterized by what Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin refer to as "abrogation" and "appropriation," the former constituting a strategy of "refusal of . . . the imperial culture, . . . its illusory standard of normative or 'correct' usage, and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning 'inscribed' in the words," while the latter "is the process

by which the language is made to 'bear the burden' of one's own cultural experience. . . . Language is adopted as a tool and utilized to express widely differing cultural experiences" (38–39).[8] Mistry's use of "a glorious foreign accent," duly noted in the jacket notes excerpting a review from the *Philadelphia Inquirer,* challenges standard English usage in an attempt to capture the cadence of certain types of Indian English usage while also freighting it with occasionally untranslatable cultural specifics. Significantly, however, the use of vernacular words and slang challenge not only the Western reader but the so-called insiders to this culture as well, requiring us to reimagine the operative scale of difference.

Mistry stages a scene within the novel that brings the issue squarely to the fore in the exchange between Gustad's friend at the bank, Dinshawji, and Laurie, the new typist, whose curvaceous beauty they both admire, the latter much less respectfully than Gustad. Dinshawji's tomfoolery and steadily worsening campaign of sexual harassment of Laurie as he gets sicker from a fatal disease reaches a new low one day:

> He stopped singing, and said, panting, "Laurie, Laurie, one day I must introduce you to my little *lorri.*" She smiled, ignorant of the Parsi slang for the male member. "Oh yes," he continued, "you will love to play with my sweet *lorri.* What fun we will have together."
>
> She nodded pleasantly, and around them, the men guffawed, digging one another in the ribs. Gustad winced. Dinshawji was going too far. But Laurie smiled again, a little puzzled, and uncovered her typewriter. (146)

The intransigent walls posed by the multilingual references and puns in the novel also stand among those we would think of as belonging on the same side in one indistinguishable mass that supposedly enjoys mutual intelligibility. In his discussion of a Renaissance Society exhibition of Shahzia Sikander's work at the University of Chicago, Homi Bhabha comments on the artist's use of a Durga/Kali figure overlaid "with the enigmatic veiled woman" ("Miniaturizing Modernity" 151). In doing so, the artist brings together not the East and the West, Bhabha notes, but "the East and the East" (151). The net result is to highlight "the nearness of difference, the intimacy of difference that can exist in any culture" (151). Mistry's elaborate doubling of the joke thrusts difference into the usually unexplored realm of those read as univocally different. Not everyone in that part of the world is on the inside for this inside joke either. The "lorri" joke succeeds (or fails) by capitalizing on incomprehension by one specific member of the audience and a sharing of the joke with at least one other. Typically, the slanting of the notion of postcolonial has shown selectivity with regard to both time and place, locating the postcolonial hybrid in international space as opposed to the postcolony, which, of course, is also hybrid and transcultural and has never been a "pure" space. In a different context, Ivan Karp wryly observes that "any good Bakhtinian knows that hybridity and conflicting complexity are part and parcel of the constitution of all selves and others, even in one locality and at one point of time. In any case, even the dispersed live in one place at a time" (292).[9]

The bases for celebrating texts for their transnational and transportable content lie in the privileging of hybridity as produced within global movements of the present, the emphasis on movements away from originary postcolonial locations rather than also inside them, and movements toward the former as well as newly emergent imperial centers. These selective emphases allow the postcolonial thus dislocated in the West to be mobilized as the desirable other in a largely dehistoricized context. The confusions of transnationalism and globalization, moreover, predispose us to attribute a diachronic flux and dynamism to cultures being produced by global movements of the present and toward the West—and to relegate the cultures of the postcolony and the "stationary" local to a state of synchronic stasis. The

performance of translation across the intimacies of difference in Mistry's use of the joke layers anew the very notion of difference as capable of multiple figurations across and within what we describe as "culture(s)."

It is, therefore, not merely the move from one language to another that exposes the borders and limits of comprehension, but the more complex operation of variant codes within it, making monolithic others other to themselves even as they are other to the dominant subject who consumes the text that speaks *other*wise. Dinshawji's many scatological jokes occasion pleasure for his male (Parsi) colleagues who obtain what Freud calls "fore-pleasure" "due to the momentary suspension of the expenditure of energy upon maintaining repression" (40). The sexual charge of Dinshawji's linguistic and code switching, moreover, alert us to another sort of erotics of communication: the invitation and the teasing, and the abrupt denial that throws up an unforeseen wall. The grammar of the self-other relationship thus includes both the thrill and the danger of externality that are inherent to the text; it is the other with which we choose to engage in quest of pleasures that quicken desire without always slaking it with the fulfillment of communion. The full charge of this relationship can only be explored in a view that accords literature its productively alien status:

> Sited somewhere on the ground of familiar language, Literature entices only to refuse, appears complicit only to cold-shoulder. Literature is always somewhere else: that which, being literate, we have not read or cannot read. Literature admits us to reading so that we can take the full measure of our exclusion: its effect is to display the secretive knowledge which is always possible but never possessed. (Eagleton, *Criticism* 165)

For Benjamin, the attentive critic must treat "texts as containers of untapped sacredness," such that interpretive unveiling will not "destroy the secret" but will constitute a revelation that does justice to the truth (quoted in Lunn 180; Arendt 41). According to Benjamin, language itself must be seen as a "symbolic mystery" rather than as an "instrumentalized system of signs used for the purpose of communicating 'something (other than itself),'" through the task of literary interpretation. To wish for a glossary that can exhaust the literary mode of signification and render the communicative act transparent constitutes a willful disacknowledgment of the mediateness of language, symptomizing a wish to possess language to erase otherness, to deny that its silences are as meaningful as its sounds. Moments of what Adorno calls "unintelligibility" in the text "render . . . the usual intelligibility suspect as being shallow, habitual— in short, preartistic" (*Notes to Literature,* II, 95).

The presence of inside jokes in the linguistic exchange instantiated in the novel are not merely playful insertions qua play alone. The meaning of Dinshawji's tasteless jest escapes Laurie for the moment but when she discovers that Dinshawji's reference is not to "his daughter or niece, or something like that," she finds her own name "ruined" for her because it reminds her "of the dirty meaning" (176). Gustad, to whom she has been complaining, tries to assure her that "Laurie is a beautiful name. That will never change just because of some silly slang word" (176). In confiding to her that Dinshawji is "also very sick, though you wouldn't think so from his jovial attitude," Gustad tries to convince her that he did not mean anything by it. In the ensuing admonitions he ministers to Dinshawji, Gustad "minced no words, wanting them to be as deadly as the *goaswalla*'s knife that went bhup!" leaving his victim with a bloodless countenance (180). Following the exchange exhorting him to "stop your jokes and teasing with everyone," we are told that "Dinshawji changed utterly" (180). It is only later that Gustad understands that Laurie was wounded by the residual moraine of Dinshawji's intent by his jests, the meaning of which has also escaped Gustad, for his friend meant no less than to prolong his survival by his capacity for projecting a jovial self, suggesting anew the ways in which "all expression is the trace left by suffering" (*Notes to Literature,* I, 83). This meaning, local to Dinshawji's own psychological needs and

excessive to the reading of others, is no more transparent to Gustad than to anyone else, fluent in Parsi argot or otherwise, even though he is aware of the connection between his friend's dwindling vitality and growing ribaldry:

> Day by day, he worried more and more for Dinshawji, for his ailing appearance, the face like parchment, the eyes battling to hide pain. But he also despaired about his embarrassing ways and the demise of his self-respect. Dinshawji was acting with abandon, in the manner of a medieval plague victim who knew that since the last vestige of hope was lost, clinging to dignity and other precious luxuries affordable by the healthy was of little use. (146)

Some measure of its import and its irreducibility to transparency communicates itself to the dying man's friend when he witnesses his transformation: "When Gustad came across him later in the day, he was surprised at how authentically Dinshawji projected his new image. Till he remembered that it seemed authentic because Dinshawji was no longer playing a role; reality, at last, had caught up with him; and Gustad felt awful for confiscating his mask" (181). As Gustad confesses this we begin to realize that the import of his jests has escaped even Dinshawji; his self-assumed mask has sustained him in ways even he cannot know till he no longer has it available. Issuing from unknown cognitive needs, this intelligence escapes even that character to whom it is "native."

Ideational, cognitive, psychological, generational, and linguistic walls, the novel reminds us, exist in many forms. They separate and isolate; they create commonalities and separations; they

protect and they hem us in; sometimes they are sacred and sometimes they keep us from seeing what is on the other side. Enclosure prevents disclosure even as it creates communities of meaning and protection from the shocks of experience. If we wished to read it as a metaphor, it would be in the sense in which Max Black presents it, as "a species of *catachresis*" that "plugs the gaps in the literal vocabulary" (33, 32). For I. A. Richards, metaphor is "a transaction between contexts" (95). Richards uses metaphor "to cover all cases where a word, in Johnson's phrase, 'gives us two ideas for one,' where we compound different uses of the word into one, and speak of something as though it were another" (116). In Mistry's usage we would find, if not "the forty-nine levels of meaning in the Torah" (94), as Benjamin writes in describing his hermeneutic practice, numerous and sometimes conflicting contexts ripe for multiple harvests (*Briefe,* vol. 2, 524).

In his references to the wall, Mistry ultimately gives us not only a metaphor for intransigence but also a space of irresolution, deferral, and endless regression. And yet this is the fragile medium in which the future must be drawn. The wall is the site for also projecting the capacity for envisioning the prospect of liberation from the tools of the "old language." One recalls that the artist decides to include in the pantheon upon the wall a *mise-en-abyme* that presents "the wall featuring a painting of the wall featuring a painting of the wall featuring a . . ." (288). Mistry's description of the *mise-en-abyme* is itself narrated in a regressive string of the same words, suggesting both the closure of an enclosed system and the unlikelihood of exposing its contradictions in the "old language." This gestural moment in the text broaches the question of exterior referentiality frontally through a somewhat oblique type of parabasis that exposes the framework of the performance in progress. If the pavement artist is a figure for the artist, the wall, we may recall, is the very canvas upon which the artist works out the possibilities. If the writer's canvas is the text itself, and language his uncertain medium, it is not only non-English words that function as a linguistic wall in the middle of the flow of communication, but language itself that is the bulwark, the barrier, the bastion, and the battlement. This, too, is part of the design in *Such a Long Journey*.

Chapter 5

Before and after Midnight: Salman Rushdie and the Subaltern Standard

> Once art has been recognized as a social fact, the sociological definition of its context considers itself superior to it and disposes over it.
>
> —Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*

This chapter begins with a discussion of Rushdie's first and ill-fated literary effort, *Grimus*. The novel, a science fiction fantasy, was published in 1975 and had been conceived, or at least reworked, by Rushdie with an eye on the Victor Gollancz Science Fiction Prize (Weatherby 35; Appignanesi and Maitland 3). Constructed by the motif of a journey, the novel catalogs Flapping Eagle's search for his sister and his encounter, in a different dimension, with his doppelgänger, Grimus.

The protagonist, Flapping Eagle, and his sister, Bird-Dog, belong (partially and precariously, we are told, on account of his unacceptable posthumous birth and initially ambiguous sex, and their unnatural behaviors) to the apocryphal tribe of Axona Amerindians. The narrator believes that the reason for this unbelonging is that "orphans in Axona are like mongrels among pedigree hounds. We were near-pariah from the moment my

father passed on, and our natures exacerbated our plight" (*Grimus* 16–17). Only later does he come to understand that "the main reason, the true cause of our detachment from our tribe, was not our orphan status, not her manliness, not her taking of a brave's name, not her general demeanour, not her at all. It was me, Joe-Sue" (17). He goes on to explain that there were three reasons for their having been ostracized:

> first, my confused sex; second, the circumstances of my birth; and third, my pigmentation. . . . To be a hermaphrodite among the Axona is to be very bad medicine. A monster. . . . To be what I was, born from dead, was a dire omen. . . . As for my colouring: the Axona are a dark-skinned race and shortish. As I grew, it became apparent that I was, inexplicably, to be fair-skinned and tallish. This further genetic aberration—*whiteness*— meant they were frightened of me and shied away from contact. (17–18)

No longer tolerated by the tribe after Bird-Dog leaves the isolated plateau that is the home of the tribe, Joe-Sue, who has been re-christened Flapping Eagle by his sister before her departure, is politely asked to "just slip away completely," by an unctuous "Sham-Man" (25). His journey, temporary sojourn in the town of K, and journey-within-journeys up Calf Mountain introduce an assortment of characters that include guides, whores, ice queens, and the heterogeneous being, Grimus. Following his encounter with Grimus, the island itself dissolves: "Deprived of the connection with all relative Dimensions, the world of Calf Mountain was slowly unmaking itself, its molecules and atoms

breaking, dissolving, quietly vanishing into primal, unmade energy" (319).

Even in this brief summary it is possible to recognize in this early work some of Rushdie's favored themes, the dangers of purist thinking; the pain of unbelonging; the motif of journeys over space and time, geographic and spiritual terrain; cultural and biological hybridity; alternative realities and dimensions of experience; and the entropy of social systems. In fact it is particularly a view from the future that exposes many of these as typical themes for the writer. Catherine Cundy suggests that the novel "offers an important insight into stylistic and thematic preoccupations developed more fully in the author's later work" (12):

> [When] viewed from the standpoint of *The Satanic Verses* . . . [it] allows us to see areas of debate which are subsequently handled with greater depth and maturity in Rushdie's later work—ideas of personal and national identity, the legacy of colonialism, the problems of exile. (12)

James Harrison claims that "those who first encounter *Grimus* after reading any or all of Rushdie's next three novels will, like a newly married couple exploring each other's family photograph albums, recognize the early stages of what they are familiar with in a later version" (33). Critical interest in this novel most often tends to take the shape of genealogical approaches that trace the evolution of these themes and stylistic particularities in the more "significant" novels. As dismissive as Rushdie is of his early effort, critics have not been particularly kind to the novel either. It is not my goal here, however, to debate the merits and demerits of the novel (its "professional brilliance," which Brennan concedes, or its bagginess, overworked logorrhea, and the adolescent punning he may not have outgrown entirely, for instance) so much as it is to examine those lines of thought initiated in *Grimus* that Rushdie

goes on to pursue in his subsequent work and to examine the signifi-cance of this early work in a reckoning of his more geographically and historically "situated" later oeuvre.

According to Tim Brennan, "*Grimus* fails even though it is carried off with professional brilliance simply because it lacks a *habitus*" (*Salman Rushdie* 70). D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke complains that Rushdie "satirizes ideas and social systems—but in the abstract. The next stage is to locate this in the real world" (15). Fletcher protests that "*Grimus* explores varieties of myth without being geographically grounded" (10). In the later novels, Cundy argues, "a crucial aspect" of Rushdie's discussion of aforementioned themes is the "use of a specific geographical setting, not only to evoke a particular atmosphere but, through it cultural and historical associations, to raise certain issues for the reader" (12–13). Critics have attempted to give to Rushdie's airy nothing in Grimus a local habitation and a name but such a reading tends to be strained. To Goonetilleke, the Axonas "represent an aspect of American society and Rushdie satirizes it, as when he dwells on the Axona obsession with health and cleanliness, their credo that 'all that is Unaxona is unclean'. . . recalling the era of McCarthyism and the prosecution of un-American activities" (7). The Axona fear of "breasted providers" such as Bird-Dog is read as a critique of "American masculine chauvinism" (7). Goonetilleke, however, does not pursue this parallel very far. James Harrison reads in the social structure offered by *Grimus* a representation of "communism in its final, ideal stage," but he abandons this analogy to conclude that "Rushdie's account of how the community works is purely theoretical—unrelated to the little that is actually shown of its workings" (36). Brennan attempts to read it as an allegory for the migrant arriviste with limited success: "That Flapping Eagle's journey is just that kind of allegory is borne out by the image of ascent . . . as though scaling Calf Mountain in search of Grimus was a physical rendering of the act of climbing the ranks of British opportunity" (72).

Various attempts have also been made to read between the lines of this novel to abstract a more readily postcolonial narrative but the novel's "admittedly flimsy. . . treatment of post-coloniality" and his "failure to engage fully with questions of migrant identity in *Grimus* has led to a dissipation of critical interest" (Cundy 20).

Brennan suggests that "if the conflict between Third-World peoples and European colonisers is evident here, it is carried out in terms so metaphorical as to be unrecognizable" (71). Ib Johansen forecloses on a postcolonial reading because "in *Grimus* the clash between different systems of values and between the people of the *third world* and their *European* colonizers is largely carried out in *metaphorical* terms. . . . In Rushdie's later novels, however, the *outsider* . . . is placed within a narrowly circumscribed *historical* space" (33). Brennan astutely notes that "the novel from the start takes on the aura of a kind of cryptic handbook—a series of codes that outline intellectual positions rather than pursue a narrative goal" (*Salman Rushdie* 71). Although the themes of migrancy, identity, hybridity *und so weiter* are available for contemplation and discussion, they don't "add up" to a postcolonial narrative because they do not evoke the favored Third World postcolonial subject. Without geography, we are to assume, these issues fail to be meaningfully historical.

If *Grimus* lacks location and situation—it floats away from its only quasireal location, the tabletop of Amerindia, to parts unknown, and takes place in no place in times present and times past—Rushdie's next novel, *Midnight's Children,* is very carefully situated. The narrator begins by addressing the matter of location and temporal context with a combination of élan and hesitation: "I was born in the city of Bombay . . . once upon a time" (3). Responding to some off-screen injunction inserted into the text —"that won't do, there's no getting away from the date"—he obligingly provides the date and the time of his birth. The postcolonial moment and place are proclaimed in a torrent of confession after the initial moment of hesitation: "Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence" (3). Beginning at this paradigmatically postcolonial moment, *Midnight's Children* also marks the inception of Rushdie's career as a postcolonial writer and as founding father for a whole generation of Indian writers to follow.[1]

Rushdie himself concedes that *Grimus* may have been too clever by half, that he had not yet found the right voice. It is usually assumed that he found it in *Midnight's Children,* which not only won the Booker McConnell Prize in 1981 but went on to win the Booker of Bookers in 1993. Rushdie's turn to India in this novel was a successful move; it not only gave him the habitus *Grimus*

lacked but it also allowed him to share a preexisting forum, that of "commonwealth literature." Regardless of other factors, it is not until the ideas and intelligence that appear in *Grimus* are recoded —I invoke Brennan's aforementioned reference to the "series of codes that outline intellectual positions" in the novel—as *native* intelligence that Rushdie finds himself "enjoying the unique pleasure of having written, for the first time, a book that people liked" (1). The recasting of concepts such as migrancy and hybridity as issues of particular resonance in the postcolonial rather than broadly intellectual context, even as *paradigmatic* postcolonial issues, underscores the mechanics of this refashioning. Rushdie's origin in the subcontinent becomes meaningful and his writing recategorized when he begins to bring his audience tales from afar (from *home,* albeit lost) in a new code that renders the native intelligible to a metropolitan audience. In Rushdie's own words, the empire now writes back. Brennan, in fact, refers to Rushdie's as "novels of information," implying a primarily, if not exclusively, colonial relationship. In Benjamin's terms, this transformation is poignantly captured as follows: "It is no longer intelligence coming from afar, but the information which supplies a handle for what is nearest that gets the readiest hearing" (*Illuminations* 89). "The prime requirement" of information, as Benjamin notes, "is that it appear 'understandable' in itself" (89). Now appropriately located within a recognizable context, the story becomes available "already shot through with explanation" through the conceptual rubrics of "commonwealth" and "postcolonial" literature (89). The ambiguities of intellectual concepts that have thus far been explored through metaphor and mythical structure are thus belatedly resolved by a resituation of the same ideas in a geographical and historical context now open to measures of verifiability.

David Harvey contends in his influential thesis on the condition of postmodernity that "in the midst of the growing abstractions of space . . . the identity of place was reaffirmed" (272). As I go on to argue, however, neither place nor time, geography nor history, adhere as neatly to the recognizable units of controlled space and time—units that are usually embodied through the modern nation and its historicized evolution— as the post-*Grimus* novels' "situatedness" would lead one to expect. In strategic terms, when Rushdie's narrator uses subcontinental history as his material in

Shame, *Midnight's Children*, *The Satanic Verses,* or *The Moor's Last Sigh,* he frames it flamboyantly as the world according to the narrator, re-forming history as *his* story, *his* story as history, one of myriad narrative possibilities. In juxtaposing past and present, moreover, into an interwoven blur, the novelist replaces historicism by a mode of aggressive constellation with different moments other to the present. At the same time as what Benedict Anderson calls the "radical separation between past and present" is denied, the here and elsewhere of historical event and experience are also rendered simultaneous as both geography and history are crimped together (*Imagined Communities* 23). The crisis of narrative caught within the throes of modernity reveals itself in a restless, shifting collage, captured within a novel conjugation of the novel form that folds time and space into each other, an aesthetic strategy that gains increasing momentum until it finds its most dramatic exposition in *The Moor's Last Sigh.*

Postcolonial challenges to colonial modernity's epistemological regime are scarcely unique to Rushdie's work. Colonial modernity's strategies of the classification and debasement of human beings aside,[2] its mastery over the space and time of the colonized were crucial components of colonization. This control was manifested variously: in its command over space as cultivable land and territory, over the colony's borders first as administrative units and later as independent nations; its regiment over the time of the colonized both through the production of their "negative history" (David Spurr's phrase) and through a reorganization of their time in clock and calendar units and as labor. Rushdie's project of a long memory for the space of the subcontinent, however, encompasses not only colonial domination of time and space in the modern moment, but a far older "history" of control over people and their fate through movement of people across space in older diasporas and the tyranny of religious conversions, expulsions, and prejudices as the collective time and space of one people is denied to its prevailing other. An understanding of the confounding intricacy of the condition of modernity, therefore, is not allowed to constitute an implicit denial of complexity to "pre-history." A strategy of collage, montage, and aesthetic figuration dominate the representation of time and space, and indeed the subaltern, in much of Rushdie's work.

The nation, in this configuration, is disaggregated and plural,

its simultaneity not so much one of a shared imagined community that is already there as it is one of simultaneity across place and time. The "other" places of this simultaneity are not only the vaunted elsewheres of a contemporary transnational reality—although they are—but also that of the past as "another country" from which one has emigrated and of the other countries that are laid over the experience of this or that one nation. The nation, a palimpsestine of formidable complexity, is a conceptual onion: a slice through would make you cry, even as it brings tears to the eyes of Moor who watches time and space dissolve alongside the possibilities that lie within them for a different future (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 433). The provisionality of this vision of community renders it unavailable for mobilization for a clear political project. Critics Brennan and Afzal-Khan have deplored this failure to provide a viable alternative that can be productively operationalized by the post-colony. Brennan argues that Rushdie's work is a failure of ideology because of his inclusion in an elite class that cannot be committed to a national struggle while the latter locates the lapses in his "inability to mythologize history" (Afzal-Khan 144n1). Rushdie's steadfast refusal to yield a grand design and his rejection of historical petrification have been understandably frustrating to a postcolonial critique seeking the now evaporated energy and directional impetus of Fanon. The nostalgic longing sometimes expressed for an unambiguous anticolonial narrative also constitutes a dirge of sorts on the loss of political clarity and the erosion of the hopeful certainties of the first phase of postcolonial resistance that was dominated by a clearer sense of political opposition. Unable to surrender to what Partha Chatterjee describes as "the old forms of the modern state," Rushdie gives us a folding of different eras and places in a far more expansive temporal and spatial frame than that prompted by colonialism and its aftermath alone (11). It is within this alternative framework that one might locate his socially anonymous subaltern and a hopelessly mystifying utopia.

Rushdie may have found a "habitus" after *Grimus* but his improper subscription to modern units of time and space creates considerable disturbance for the expectations one might have for a properly post-colonial writer. His treatment of history, of the subaltern, and indeed of a future for the postcolonial nation has scarcely yielded the kind of political project that continues to be

expected by many concerned critics. An overly cosmopolitan Rushdie has all too often eclipsed the poetic and political aspects of his work in a "native" context—both as an aesthetic project and as a multilocated text with valence beyond the transnational context. While location is not irrelevant, it is perhaps the very sense of First and Third World as monolithic rather than shot through with multiple constituencies and audiences that allow the casting of Rushdie as a First World writer in a supposedly tripartite but functionally bipolar world by his critics and as the voice of the Third World by his Western readers.[3] The first casts him in the excessive and expansive space of internationalism while the other confines him to the temporally backward spatial category of the Third World. Both positions respond to the conflicted problem of representation in a shifting world that is far from abandoning its subscription to spatial distinctiveness. Rushdie may well be the poster child (and therefore sometimes the favored whipping boy) for a certain formulaic postcolonialism, but a reading more attuned to his particular treatment of "stock" postcolonial themes uncovers a more interrogatory than confirmatory stance toward them.[4] Such a reading also begins to reveal the complex modes of representation that produce neither "hit-" nor "mis-" representations but those self-identical with themselves in the intrinsic logic of the text. Subalternity and hybridity, two central postcolonial concepts, appear as concerns that are obviously thematic, certainly ideological, but also aesthetic in *Midnight's Children*, *Shame,* and *The Moor's Last Sigh.* This nexus of interests leads to a contrapuntal evaluation of the novels' traffic with these ideas: If aestheticization renders the horrible tolerable by virtue of its transformative medium, it also succeeds in conjuring up a vision of what *could be* against what *is.* The textual use of ecphrases, myth, and allegory in these novels suggests an aesthetics of representation as figuration, thus encoding the "intelligence" of the texts; while the emphasis on "unforgetting" takes place in a context both transnational and devotedly nationalist or "native" in its awareness of the forgotten subaltern and the underreported local face of hybridity. In the discussion to follow, I examine the question of representation in three different critical maneuvers: by examining the challenges for representation thrown up by the ironic relation of history to story, by discussing the aesthetic representation of subalternity in

Rushdie's works, and finally, by relocating the postcolonial issues of migration and hybridity from the transnational and postmodern to the local subcontinental and the matter of representation from the sociocultural alone to the native context of artful composition.

The expectation of representation that operates within the practical discipline has accustomed many to accept the postcolonial novel—I isolate this genre because it is predominant in postcolonial literature— as a testimonial of sorts. The postcolonial novel takes shape in the context of a historical event, and is thus, like Saleem in *Midnight's Children,* "fathered by" and "handcuffed to history" (118, 9), or like the Moor's tale, "expelled from . . . story, tumbled towards history" (5). This relationship of history to story had led to disappointments for readers and critics on both sides of the global/local divide. Greeted with great expectations (perhaps not entirely unreasonably so), the postcolonial text that had arrived was read eagerly and found disappointing by many:

> Many readers wanted it to be the history, even the guidebook, which it was never meant to be. . . . These variously disappointed readers were judging the book not as a novel, but as some sort of inadequate reference book or encyclopaedia. (*Imaginary Homelands* 25)

The celebrated "mistakes" of *Midnight's Children* are intended to reiterate that it is far "from being an authoritative guide to the history of post-independence India," but Indian readers, perhaps uncannily aware of the representational burden borne by this sort of text, were greatly troubled by them (Rushdie, "'Errata'" 23). It is not only the paucity of representation in historical accounts and the general anxiety over absence that place this demand on the postcolonial writer and text; it is also the "represented" constituency's heightened awareness of the power of cultural representations in the contemporary global broadcasting machine.

In the grammar of Vasco Miranda, a character in *The Moor's Last Sigh,* it is not representation versus misrepresentation that is the issue, but that of hit-representation as in "'hit-take, hit-alliance, hit-conception . . . . Opposite of mis-'" (150). Those who perceive themselves as represented are aware that these representations can be used against them in the global context. The anxieties about authenticity and resistance that surround the postcolonial text arise from an awareness of its commodity value in the global information loop where Western control of the technologies of representation is still seen as dominant.

In much of his work, however, it is clear that Rushdie attempted to forestall, if not all the disappointments that readers and critics complain of, at least the possibility of the literalist fallacy and a "mistake of categories" ("In Good Faith" 17). Among them is the device of retelling of history as rumor and gossip as well as through simultaneous affirmation and negation in ambivalent reports of historical events. In his 1999 novel *The Ground beneath Her Feet,* Rushdie melodramatizes the discreteness of fact and fiction in proleptic gestures of anticipatory caution against being taken literally. The novel includes such gratuitous errata as the U.S. president's narrow escape in Dallas, Texas, and the theory that John F. Kennedy and Robert F. Kennedy were assassinated on the same day and by the same bullet. In this flamboyantly alternative history, Oswald's rifle jams, *Don Quixote* is actually written by Pierre Menard, the Watergate affair is a cheap, fictional novel, and so on. In *The Moor's Last Sigh,* the author "starts" the Second World War a month early, in August 1939 (68). Although it is not always clear if Rushdie's metropolitan audience always "gets it" when he trifles with subcontinental history, the disjuncture in his insertion of these errors lies in the unlikelihood of the reader mistaking them for any but deliberately planned novelistic acts, even if he had not insisted on their existence as deliberately unlike historical *doppele.* The "asymmetric ignorance" (Dipesh Chakrabarty's phrase indicating that "we" must cite them; "they" need not know anything about us) of the typical First World reader places a far greater burden on the writer attempting to represent (or mis- or dis-represent) the postcolonial condition in an ironic mode.

Rushdie's many changelings, dating back to Flying Eagle in *Grimus,* and his many unstable, unreliable narrators have been

read in terms of an obsessive concern with subjectivity in a mode continuous with Western postmodernism. Thus, plurality and what Leela Gandhi refers to as "textual plenitude" have been read primarily, if not exclusively, through the prism of postmodernity (157). Because it is assumed, and often correctly, that "metropolitan culture designates itself as the privileged addressee —the chosen audience—of the romantic postcolonial text," it is also assumed that the Rushdie text is itself constituted solely by this purpose (162). In this sort of reading, the text offers the mirage of opposition in a quixotic battle fought by an army of words; its migrantcentered ruminations on identity constitute no more than a beguiling, postmodern soufflé of identity, without substance or the staying power necessary for a meaningful postcolonial resistance; its message and import are presumed to be packaged and signposted for nonnatives; its true North is the West; and its antagonist the fading empire and its ambiguous legacy. The reduction of a worldwide readership to the category of transnational metropolitan, however, reduces the very plenitude of textual possibilities that supposedly enable the casting of a wide net to capture a globally metropolitan audience. The failure to conceive of an alternate addressee, necessarily indefinable because not yet conceived, hobbles the ability to transvaluate the text in a different context in which the point of reference is neither the postmodern nor the transnational.

It may well be that "one obvious reason for *Midnight's Children*'s successful intervention in the Western literary scene was its familiarity to readers of other well-known satirists of nationalism and dependency," as Brennan notes, but there is a particular indigenous context in which the novel might be resituated in order to better comprehend its generational complexity, that is, both the conditions of its conception and its temporal significance for the author's generation in the life of the nation. The errata in the text and Rushdie's subsequent musings on the subject have been read as "a description of a postmodern artist's exploration of unreliable narration" by those interested in approaching the text through a postmodern frame; Cundy argues that this issue might alternatively be read as "an illustration of the 'erratic' process by which the migrant's sense of history reconstitutes itself *through* memory" (32). The transnational and the diasporic perspectives, so plausibly advanced in certain interpretations, comprise

possibilities considerably abated, however, in the absence of a consideration of the national dimension of the novel's telling. A third interpretive possibility surfaces if we take our cue from the title itself, which suggests the notion of an encounter within a more local purview.

Midnight's Children may be a novel about memory but the fragmentation and absence of memory is not only that of the departed immigrant but also that of a new generation that is without memory precisely because it has not commemorated its subaltern history and has nothing to remember of the nationalist struggle except through the performative life of the nation. One might thus consider the problem to be one not only of the immigrant searching for "lost time" (*Imaginary Homelands* 24) and one not so much of a generation that is trying to remember but that of one calling to account those who appear to have forgotten, those who ought to have created "the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation" (Benjamin, *Illuminations* 98). As an elaborate exercise in failed anamnesis, the narrative addresses a collective generational amnesia as much (or as little) as it does the problem of the diffused subject who is multiply and ambiguously conflicted or that of the expatriate who cannot remember but in fragments. To this generation, the story of the nation and of the nationalist struggle is available not only as historical event and record but as fairy tale, myth, and fable. Theirs is a vision not of the nation as an ideal whole but that of a legacy and inheritance of a nation already divided, not only through external political boundaries but increasingly pernicious internal ones that have marginalized certain narratives and omitted what Guha calls "*the politics of the people*" ("On Some Aspects" 40).

Midnight's Children, first published in 1980, belongs as much to a new transnational current as it does to a wave of expressive discontent sweeping the country some three decades after the hopeful acquisition of self-determination by nationalist leaders. Guha reminds us that the period between the eruptions of Naxalite insurgency in the 1970s and the end of the Emergency "has often been described as a period of disillusionment and *Subaltern Studies* as one of its outcomes" (xi). He explains that the revolt of the 1970s "amounted to youth calling age to account" (xii–xiii). "What came to be questioned," he elucidates, "was thus not only the

record of the ruling party, which had been in power for over two decades by then, but the entire generation that had put it in power. The young born, like Saleem Sinai, 'handcuffed to history,' were eager to break away from that 'history' meant for them as the legacy of a past made up of what they regarded as utopian dreams, hollow promises, and unprincipled political behavior of their elders" (xiii). In a 1990 interview, "Imaginative Maps," Rushdie reminds his interviewer Una Chaudhuri: "You have to remember that it *[Midnight's Children]* was written very largely during and immediately after the Emergency, which were not optimistic times. And so if it bears the mark of that, it's not surprising." Or, as Saleem puts it, perhaps as Rushdie speaking *in ventriloquus:* "Today I gave myself the day off and visited Mary. A long hot dusty bus-ride through streets beginning to bubble with the excitement of the coming Independence Day, although I can smell other, more tarnished perfumes: disillusion, venality, cynicism" (546). Elsewhere, Rushdie explicitly admits that *Midnight's Children* enters its subject from the point of view of "a secular man. I am a member of that generation of Indians who were sold the secular ideal" (*Imaginary Homelands* 16).

In situating Rushdie's narrative within this particular generational and temporal framework, I do not seek to classify *Midnight's Children* as a terrorist text that might be equated with the roughly coeval Naxalite insurgency, a movement in revolt against the disillusion and cynicism of the 1970s; nor do I wish to falsely aggrandize Rushdie's contribution to the representation of the subaltern. My more modest aim is to underscore the inheritance of a generation of writers conflicted not only by multiple cultural influences and the temptations of transnational mobility but also by the shared local legacy of a nation conceived from its very inception by lack and absence and their disappointment at what Guha calls "the *failure of the Indian bourgeoisie to speak for the nation*" ("On Some Aspects" 41). Despite the reckoning of sympathetic critics and the author himself, "textual plenitude," however inventive, cannot in the end substitute for a whole national text of the nation; at most it might be read as hysterical overcompensation for a dramatic absence in the historical national narrative, nothing less, to use a Rushdieism, than a subaltern-sized hole in the fabric of the nation. The attempts to compensate this loss will only emphasize its

impossibility, as the text itself reveals, in its formalizing of the dilemma posed by history.

"Consumed multitudes are jostling and shoving inside me," claims the narrator in the opening chapter entitled "The Perforated Sheet." When he commences the remaking of his life, he finds that he is "guided only by the memory of a large white bedsheet with a roughly circular hole" (4). But rather more than a memory, "that holey, mutilated square of linen" is his "talisman . . . [his] open-sesame" (4). The narrator's attempts to fill the hole in the whole leads to fantastic attempts to swallow the entirety of "intermingled lives events miracles places rumors," everything that the elite record has suppressed (4). The diffusion of subalternity through amorphous and ill-defined personalities and groups in Rushdie's subcontinental novels provides an umbrage rather than a representation of the missing, the presence signified through absence, the whole through the recurrent image of the hole. We, like the narrator of *Midnight's Children,* are pointed in the direction but never quite directed to the precise point. One of Saleem's earliest memories is of a painting that hung directly above his crib; in the ecphrastic description provided by the narrator, we find some of the elements of the conflicted legacy described above:

> The fisherman's pointing finger: unforgettable focal point of the picture which hung on a sky-blue wall in Buckingham Villa, directly above the sky-blue crib in which, as Baby Saleem, midnight's child, I spent my earliest days. The young Raleigh—and who else?—sat, framed in teak, at the feet of an old, gnarled, net-mending sailor. . . whose right arm, fully extended, stretched out towards a watery horizon, while his liquid tales rippled around the fascinated ears of

> Raleigh—and who else? Because there was certainly another boy in the picture, sitting cross-legged in frilly collar and button-down tunic . . . and now a memory comes back to me: of a birthday party in which a proud mother and an equally proud ayah dressed a child with a gargantuan nose in just such a collar, just such a tunic. (142)

Garbed in the incongruous vestments of "English milords," the young boy, like the painting, is a tribute to the empire and its ongoing centrality for a servile native elite that is defeated even in victory, dependent even when assumed to be independent. But what else does the pointing figure allude to?

> In a picture hanging on a bedroom wall, I sat beside Walter Raleigh and followed a fisherman's pointing finger with my eyes; eyes straining at the horizon, beyond which lay—what?—my future, perhaps; my special doom, of which I was aware from the beginning, as a shimmering grey presence in that sky-blue room, indistinct at first, but impossible to ignore . . . because the finger pointed even further than that shimmering horizon . . . driving my eyes towards another frame . . . the Prime Minister's missive, which arrived . . . one week after my photograph

> appeared on the front page of the Times of India. (142–43)

This time our attention is drawn to the hopes of the nation: "Newspapers celebrated me; politicians ratified my position" (143). But beyond these allusions is another possible direction:

> Perhaps the fisherman's finger was not pointing at the letter in the frame; because if one followed it even further, it led one out through the window, down the two-storey hillock, across Warden Road, beyond Breach Candy Pools, and out to another sea which was not the sea in the picture; a sea on which the sails of Koli dhows glowed scarlet in the setting sun . . . an accusing finger, then, which obliged us to look at the city's dispossessed. (143–44)

But the dispossessed are never concretely realized in the retelling of the nation's story. The Koli fishermen, unnamed in the description, have already been abstracted into the image of their boats; the use of metonymy here performs an outright replacement, and one that is never remedied by a reversal that draws our attention to those who ply their trade in those dhows that glow scarlet against the sun. The narrator returns us to this image toward the close of the novel when he ends up in his old ayah's bedroom in an apartment that stands upon the ruins of his old home; "Her bedroom occupies more or less the same cube of air in which a fisherman's pointing finger led a boyish pair of eyes out towards the horizon" (546). As the ayah sings to his son (who

is not his son), the narrator offers a single phrase fragment: “Red dhow-sails spread against the sky” (546).

No mention is made of accusations or omissions; the phrase stands on its own, brimming with suggestion, replete with omissions. As much as he tries to pickle, contain, and label, the narrator knows that he must live “with the shadows of imperfection” (548). “In words and pickles,” he has “immortalized” his memories, and now “thirty jars stand upon a shelf, waiting to be unleashed upon the amnesiac nation” (549). There is at the end, however, “one jar” that “stands empty” and that, the narrator claims, is the “jar that must remain empty. . . What cannot be pickled, because it has not taken place” (550). What has not taken place, however, might be read as much in terms of the unknown future as it might in terms of an oversight in the past: we are left then with the image of a void filled with an amorphous plenitude. The unexpected conjunction of past and present provide one of those glimpses into a conception of a possible utopia “grounded in recollection,” as Marcuse phrases it.

The book’s final long sentence spirals into an image of “the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes” (552). In their alienation from the national narrative, faceless subalterns are apt to be figured in the variform guise of an alien nation that is mysterious and menacing, a hole that threatens to draw the nation into its hungry and abysmal vortex:

> Yes, they will trample me underfoot, the numbers marching one two three, four hundred million five hundred six, reducing me to specks of voiceless dust, just as, in all good time, they will trample my son who is not my son, and his son who will not be his, and his who will not be his, until the thousand and first generation, until a thousand and one midnights have bestowed their terrible

> gifts and a thousand and one children have died. (552)

The note of terror in this culminating apocalyptic passage underscores the extent to which the narrator wishes to be but is unable to be a successful "swallower of lives" (4). In the conclusion to *Midnight's Children,* it is the narrator who is reduced "to specks of voiceless dust." Haunted to the end by the fear of his own treachery and unwitting usurpation of another's birthright, Saleem is powerless to encompass all of the nation's realities, has never, in fact, contained the world, and is terrified of its unknown potential. The fear of the mob within the modern form of the democracy, the nation's anxiety over its uncontainable excess, and its dismay at the prospect of judgment coalesce in the terror of the novel's final articulation of the fate of midnight's children.

The absence of conventional characterization in Rushdie's novels demonstrates his early interest in what Brennan calls "intellectual positions" rather than in individual psyche or experience. Within this scheme, subalternity is located not in subalterns but in the attribution of subalternity to a shifting pattern of circumstance and event. In *The Moor's Last Sigh,* subalternity is conveyed through a catalog of rage and despair:

> the face-slapping quarrels of naked children at a tenement standpipe, the grizzled despair of idling workers smoking beedis on the doorsteps of locked-up pharmacies, the silent factories, the sense that the blood in men's eyes was just about to burst through and flood the streets, the toughness of women with saris pulled over their heads, squatting by tiny primus stoves in pavement-dwellers'

> jopadpatti shacks as they tried to conjure meals from empty air. (130)

Conceived as a notion both fractal and mobile, subalternity operates as an interpenetrative logic rather than as a characteristic fixed to a group or a character. The author's self-confessed perspectival proclivities also impact this mode of representation. Rushdie states:

> When I began the novel *[Midnight's Children]* . . . my purpose was somewhat Proustian. Time and migration had placed a double filter between me and my subject, and I hope that if I could only imagine vividly enough it might be possible to see beyond those filters, to write as if the years had not passed, as if I haven't left India for the West. But as I worked I found that what interested me was the process of filtration itself. ("Errato," 24)

This interest, coupled by the distance produced by migration and time, amalgamates aesthetic with other considerations to produce a hazy picture of that which is represented. José Ortega y Gasset uses an interesting metaphor to describe the curious machinations involved in this shift:

> To see a thing we must adjust our visual apparatus in a certain way. . . . Take a

> garden seen through a window. . . . Since we are focussing on the garden and our ray of vision is directed toward it, we do not see the window but look clear through it. The purer the glass, the less we see it. But we can also deliberately disregard the garden, and withdrawing the ray of vision, detain it at the window. We then lose sight of the garden; what we still behold of it is a confused mass of color which appears pasted to the pane. Hence to see the garden and to see the window-pane are two incompatible operations. (9–10)

Rushdie's interest in filtration, one might argue, is a cognate factor in the overall mode of representation in terms both poetic and political. The hazy filter intervenes in the project of presentation, not distorting or improving, neither hit- nor mis-, but as the necessary ambiguity that is intrinsic to the aesthetic mode. At the level of conceptual notion, subalternity is one of many leakages described in the novel, seeping into the national fabric as a scattered and fluid reality. It is linked, moreover, with terror, violence, and shame. Rushdie's fondness for abstractions and corporate subjects—the major character in almost any of his novels is a crowd of sorts—expresses not the equivalence of character as symbol but of the dispersal of material suffering and pain through disjunctive, fragmented, and discontinuous iterations that frustrate the quest for homologies.

A reading, for instance, of Sufiya Zinobia (the monstrous child-woman who suffers excessively from shame, both remembered and vicarious, in the novel eponymously named for her chief characteristic) as the silent, demarcated child subaltern subject produced by Western and patriarchal historiography in the

postcolony is thus likely to be tested by several limitations. On the one hand, it is tempting to approach her as a symbolic representation of the marginalized Pakistani/postcolonial subject. A character whose "chief defining characteristic was her excessive sensitivity to the bacilli of humiliation," "Sufiya Hyder blushed uncontrollably whenever her presence in the world was noticed by others. But she also, I believe, blushed for the world" (*Shame* 152, 131). On the surface of it, she appears to be a functional representation of the wronged subaltern subject. We might argue that she has internalized a turbulent and corrupt history, ultimately to direct against it a fury that leaves even her stupidly astonished. Humiliated, untended, and unloved by all but her father and a curiously besotted Omar Khayyam, she has become a monstrous aberration that has learned to hate itself.

Revolting though she is, the postcolonial monster is yet protected by a patriarchal system that is determined, if not Pygmalion-like, to reform and beautify, then at least to manage and maintain. Unable to contain the violence of this subject, the agent of the state, Sufiya's hapless bridegroom, finds that he cannot consummate his marriage with the beloved. He (arguably representative of the agency of the state, its passive toady, and spoilt scion of a corrupt elite) is ultimately destroyed by her. In this hasty reading, it is possible to conceive of Sufiya as a personification of the subaltern subject characterized by "the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class [Sufiya's class affiliations are meaningless given her abjection], caste, age, gender and office [she has none]" (Guha, Preface 35). But Rushdie balks at the equivalence.

Sufiya's motivation and action are characterized by uncategorizable randomness rather than progressive design or plot movement. If her gender and her retardation suggest abjection, Sufiya's family connections situate her, albeit not very meaningfully, as a member of the ruling class. If Sufiya has provocation to rebel, her revolt has no fixed target, no clear motive. Sufiya, moreover, is progressively dematerialized in the course of the story. "This is a novel," the narrator reminds us, "about Sufiya, elder daughter of General Raza Hyder and his wife Bilquìs, about what happened between her father and Chairman Iskander Harappa, formerly Prime Minister, now defunct, and

about her surprising marriage to a certain Omar Khayyam Shakil, physician, fat man and for a time the intimate crony of that same Isky Harappa, whose neck had the miraculous power of remaining unbruised, even by a hangman's rope" (59). But lest we think that Sufiya's story is a veiled allegory for the fate of the subaltern, we might consider that the narrator continues with the following: "Or perhaps it would be more accurate, if also more opaque, to say that Sufiya Zinobia is about this novel" (59).

The character's trajectory is ultimately subservient to that of the tale; Sufiya's fate is determined by the narrative force of ideas and principles rather than by character alone. Although Rushdie provides rather more of a psychological profile for Sufiya than we find in most of his other characters, it is as a somatogenic subject that she is introduced into the machinery of the narrative. In *The Nervous System,* Michael Taussig argues that "things such as the signs and symptoms of disease, as much as the technology of healing, are not 'things-in-themselves,' are *not only* biological and physical, but *are also* signs of social relations disguised as natural things, concealing their roots in human reciprocity" (83). If this were a novel written in the social realist mode Sufiya might serve as an illustration of the socioeconomic victimization suffered by the subaltern, but Rushdie has disavowed an interest in social realism, not because "I don't like realism, but it seems to me that it's a convention that has tried to impose itself as some kind of objective truth" ("Imaginative Maps"). The implication is that the form itself carries the politics of the position assumed by the author, that subalternity lies across society rather than in individuals. As the tale moves toward its atomic resolution, Sufiya is simultaneously aggrandized into mythic proportions even as she dwindles into abstraction and immateriality: "What had escaped, what now roamed free in the unsuspecting air, was not Sufiya Zinobia Shakil at all, but something more like a principle, the embodiment of violence, the pure malevolent strength of a Beast" (268). In the inadequation of epistemological knowledge and its object, "Objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 5).

Because the mythic and the monstrous are anomalous in "civilized society,""[the] world made a huge effort of the will to ignore the reality of her, to avoid bringing matters to the point at which she, disorder's avatar, would have to be dealt with,

expelled" (219). As a matter of fact, "the more powerful the Beast became, the greater grew the efforts to deny its very being" (220). Rushdie eventually transforms her into the projectional fantasy of retribution: "as though she had never been more than a rumour, a chimaera, the collective fantasy of a stifled people, a dream born of their rage" (291). The author is uninterested in describing Sufiya in the sense in which Aijaz Ahmad uses it: "To 'describe' is to specify a locus of meaning, to construct an object of knowledge and to produce a knowledge that will be bound by that act of descriptive construction" (*In Theory* 99). We are encouraged to think of Sufiya as a principle, an embodiment, a repository rather than as a symbol whose valence is designed to cohere. Self-fractured from organic wholeness, endlessly transformed into plural selves, she becomes the unnamable, indescribable being who can be denied but cannot be ignored, who is sighted everywhere and found nowhere: "Slowly it became clear to him [Omar] that the stories of the white panther were indeed being told again; but what was remarkable was that they had begun to come from all over the country. . . . It was a large country, even without its East Wing, a land of wildernesses and marshy deltas studded with mangrove trees and mountain fastnesses and voids; and from every out-of-theway corner of the nation, it seemed, the tale of the panther was travelling to the capital" (280).

At this point, Sufiya has begun to function as contagion, as one of those disembodied ancestral voices prophesying war from every corner of the country, not as an oppressed subject whose transformation and subsequent choices can serve as a cautionary tale or as a mobilizing force. Although the latter appeals to our need for homologies in the postcolonial novel, Sufiya frustrates our attempts to fix her into subjectivity. If anything, Sufiya is *de*-scribed, increasingly fragmented, effectively exploded, and eventually unwritten by the logic of the narrative that claims that "the power of the Beast of shame cannot be held for long within any one frame of flesh and blood, because it grows, it feeds and swells, until the vessel bursts. And then the explosion comes" (317). It is possible to argue that it is the nature of resistance, too, to be mythologized, but Sufiya's violence, born of shame, is unbridled by the logic of resistance; it is governed, instead, by the indiscriminate hunger for violence: "The killings continued: farmers, pie-dogs, goats. The murders formed a death-ring round

the house; they had reached the outskirts of the two cities, new capital and old town. Murders without rhyme or reason, done, it seemed, for the love of killing, or to satisfy some hideous need" (287).

Again, although one finds in this description an echo of elite historical accounts of peasant rebellion that characterized peasant revolts as irrational and sporadic outbursts and crimes, denying the possibility of insurgency as "a motivated and conscious undertaking on the part of the rural masses," and although the violence she unleashes is necessarily outside the law and inadmissible in the history of the nation-state, Rushdie's failure to connect it plausibly with "the collective fantasy of a stifled people" disallows a reading of her career as any more than an allusion to the rage (and shame) that arise from shameless oppression (Guha, "The Prose of Counter Insurgency" 46).[5] In *The Prison Notebooks,* Gramsci contends that "the history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic. There undoubtedly does exist a tendency to (at least provisional stages of) unification in the activity of these groups, but this tendency is continually interrupted by the activity of the ruling groups; it can therefore only be demonstrated when an historical cycle is completed and this cycle culminates in a success" (54–55). A strategy of depicting subalternity as figuration, then, attempts to encompass its elusiveness and its ineluctability in the midst of the chaotic process of nation making.

Subalternity is here, and elsewhere, as in *Midnight's Children,* construed as an alternative mode of migrancy that disperses and endlessly displaces the notion but never conveys the sense of a group or class approaching unification or a common destiny. When the subject of group action is broached, as it is in Rushdie's piecemeal and brief references to tribal insurgency in the "Impossible Mountains," it is dispatched with cursory references to raids on "military outposts and railway lines and water reservoirs" in the space of a paragraph (*Shame* 97, 141). Brutally and swiftly quelled by Raza Hyder, the tribals command very little space in the national narrative, serving principally to underscore the control and domination of the state and its military arm and to demonstrate the extent to which exploitative maldevelopment in the postcolony reveals another face of internal colonialism.

Rushdie's complex relationship to the question of subalternity

creates a curious crisis of representation. In an encompassing vision that is sensitive to all who are excluded from state power and the national narrative (including women, however problematically) but never accepts class-based determinism as exclusive criterion or objective conceptual groups as known, Rushdie undertakes a project alternatively in excess of the class struggle of the subaltern and far short of it. Consequently, the subaltern is neither meaningfully represented nor quite absent; Rushdie can neither represent the subaltern subject for a political program nor quite turn away from it. Like the painter Vasco Miranda in *The Moor's Last Sigh,* what he represents is "a presence, and an absence. A fullness, and an emptiness. . . . Behold. He who hath eyes to see, let him see" (158). Existing palimpsestically at some level—to use one of Rushdie's favorite conceptual metaphors—the subject is dimly present, but always overwritten decisively by other scripts that cannot erase it completely but will not allow it to emerge with clarity. These double gestures are captured not only through narrative choices but also through the choice of genre.

As a generic modality, fantastic fabulism operates not only as a preferred aesthetic choice commensurate with metropolitan tastes but also as a means of conveying this two-pronged indeterminacy. The interdependence of force and consent implied by this simultaneous inclusion/ exclusion is characterized by a stance at once critical of and constituted by the ideological force of the subcontinental nation. This double and elusive mode of representation is a gesture that might be read in deconstructive terms as placing the concept of the subaltern *sous rature* or in postmodern terms as provoking a crisis of meaning; equally appropriately, it signals an alternative means of de-essentialization, a cancellation/affirmation prompted by a sense of the complexity of local realities and disjunctures, and therefore, necessarily, without an accompanying program that can organize the object of oppression. In its preoccupation with the nation-state's production of varieties of alienation, the narrative itself adopts a migratory mode as it rehearses diverse sorts of unbelonging. Despite the recurring use of a prophetic and apocalyptic tone (in *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, *The Moor's Last Sigh,* and even *The Ground beneath Her Feet*), moreover, Rushdie's is usually a backward glance in which it is the past that prophesies

the present, not the present that points to a future; consequently, in this backward scope, the prospect of hope is found in the past rather than in the future, as in *The Moor's Last Sigh,* denying the structural telos of history and empirical reality.

Rushdie's subcontinental novels provide a text not of remedies and prospects but of fugitive fragments of (im)possible representation. It is the joint inability of the national narrative and the writer to adequately represent and encompass that produces the conflicted texts of Rushdie's post-*Grimus* endeavors. Although it might be argued that there is no dearth of cultural expression that takes on the mantle of subaltern representation in terms more consonant with Ahmad's notion of description, it is possible to glimpse in the reluctance outlined above a possible emancipatory stance. In a backward transfer from the novel to the world of politics, the conception of the subaltern as figurative offers a powerful mode of thinking the object ethically. The imagination of the oppressed figure as poetic rather than literal may conceivably leave its integrity intact without foreclosing on the project of addressing its needs and desires. The elasticity of this figurative representation may also pose a flexible response to the problem of ethical action in the face of an unknown future.

The representation thus presented as self-canceling is not, however, so elusive as to evade recognition of its explicit intent to indict. If Rushdie is seen as exotically political by Western critics (according to Brennan, *Salman Rushdie* 38) and not political enough because of his elitism, he has been seen as entirely too political by the discomfited Indian and Pakistani governments. Indira Gandhi sued over *Midnight's Children,* and won, causing certain passages to be excised from subsequent editions of the novel.[6] *Shame* was banned immediately after publication, and the local Maharashtrian government imposed a swift, if brief, ban on *The Moor's Last Sigh.* Rushdie's portraiture of the Emergency and Indira Gandhi, some speculate, is what prompted her son Rajiv Gandhi's government to move with undue haste to ban *The Satanic Verses.* I will not repeat here Rushdie's various depictions of rapacious and selfcentered "*chamchas* and other sellouts," as Brennan terms them, in the latter's detailed and illuminating discussion in a section of the same name in *Salman Rushdie and the Third World,* but I would underscore their valence for a domestic audience (85).

Notwithstanding the limited audience for his work in the subcontinent, the force of his representations is meaningful for what is arguably the most powerful segment of the population, the educated Englishspeaking elite that may constitute no more than 3 to 5 percent of the population but together outnumbers the population of New Zealand and Australia. Of *Midnight's Children,* Tariq Ali observed that "Rushdie's novel will not reach the South Asian masses," but "it will be read by an English speaking intelligentsia, . . . and, in that sense, it is extremely important" (91). Rushdie's subcontinental books are deeply political on the "other" side; as postcolonial programs grow in the universities in South Asia, students there too need to read about which attributes of South Asian "culture" one ought rightly to be patriotic about. In the context of this more local reading public in the subcontinent, however Westernized and distanced from the "politics of the people," Rushdie's employment of a ludic tone does not conceal the serious charge of the state's multiple disenfranchisement of various sectors in its constituency or an indictment of those who collude in the state's deficient and exclusionary politics. Only a view from the West, directed to the West would find these issues politically irrelevant.

In the final section of this chapter, I begin by exploring the extent to which it is possible to transvaluate the supposedly "transnational" concept of hybridity in the context of the *subcontinental* politics of inclusion and exclusion. In the concluding segment, however, I will suggest that hybridity is transformed into a conceptual aesthetic for collapsing time and space through a collage-montage format of citing/siting the past as utopic elsewhere in the midst of the present. This synthesis of the historical content of hybridity with a creative aesthetic composes a constellative seizure of the traces of various texts through a visual logic, and in a new trial combination that may have "nothing to say only to show," to cite Benjamin, the best known proponent of montage theory (quoted in Buck-Morss, *Dialectics of Seeing* 73).

Thus far, it is the postmodern and the First World centric senses of migrancy and hybridity that tend to predominate in an understanding of the postcolonial. In responding to the question, "Where is the post-colonial?" Harish Trivedi cynically returns the following:

> Apparently the postcolonial is at home either in the metropolis . . . or in diaspora but never where he comes from. Home for him is where he himself isn't but probably was some time ago, until he became post-colonial after which all he needs is a location. The "unhomed" of (un)Homi Bhabha inhabit, as we know, an interstitial Third Space which becomes available presumably when one has come out of the Third World. ("The Postcolonial or the Transcolonial" 270)

Migrancy and hybridity, terms so closely associated with postcolonialism as to be almost synonymous with it, are, because of the perceptions Trivedi so articulately describes, generally recognized through movements away from and out of the Third World. They are also understood, owing to an undue emphasis on novelty, as concepts of particular—by extension, exclusive—value for the present moment. Appearing alongside collateral terms such as syncreticism, hybridity, and new universalism, novelty is the dominant measure of value in the academic emporium. If the market is "the First Cause of contemporary thinking" (Malcolmson 239), Rushdie's oft-quoted phrase is the default formula of this mode: "*Mélange,* hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world*" (*Imaginary Homelands* 394). Rushdie's point, that this newness has been entering the world forever, "throughout human history," however, seems to have been muted as he is always already read for First World consumption (394).

His contention that the world was always making itself anew, that "uncertainty [is] the only constant, change . . . the only sure thing" dovetails with the current penchant for the contemporary present as marked by unprecedented change and rarely chaotic uncertainties (405). However, Rushdie's work repeatedly identifies not "the new wave" but the ebb and tide of history itself. The

diaspora of British Muslims as a reality of this time in that place (England) as thrown into relief by the Rushdie affair, for instance, is matched up by scores of diasporas from time immemorial that appear in his works. Rushdie's own diasporic move is one among many that his one-time fellow countrymen have been making for centuries; as Chamcha puts it, "The earth is full of Indians, you know that, we get everywhere, we become tinkers in Australia and our heads end up in Idi Amin's fridge. Columbus was right, maybe; the world's made up of Indies, East, West, North" (*Satanic Verses* 54). In a triangulated modality, the concept of hybridity (as well as that of migrancy) can be read through a premodern and extracolonial grid as well. In addition to its reconceptualization in terms temporal, spatial, and conceptual, moreover, in *The Moor's Last Sigh,* the author comes to see its "potential for darkness as well as for light."

In her critical introduction to postcolonial theory, Leela Gandhi observes that "the discourse of literary hybridity becomes a sort of guilty political rationalisation of readerly preference" (162). Commenting on the overemphasis on contemporary diasporic migrations to the First World, Stuart Hall notes that colonization "made the 'colonies' themselves, and even more, large tracts of the 'post-colonial' world, always already 'diasporic' in relation to what might be thought of as their cultures of origin. The notion that only the multicultural cities of the First World are 'diasporaised' is a fantasy which can only be sustained by those who have never lived in the hybridised spaces of a Third World, so-called 'colonial,' city" ("When Was the 'Post-Colonial'?" 250). These observations, however insightful, both betray their preoccupation with metropolitan contexts. Not surprisingly, most of the interpretive activity spurred by Rushdie's work has foregrounded the aforementioned, leading to a standard of sorts for Rushdie criticism. Without denying that the realities of intellectual production ensure that these contexts have a foundational bearing on virtually all postcolonial endeavors, it is possible to suggest a conscious redirection that illuminates other hermeneutic possibilities. The teeming abundance and multiple coding of Rushdie's work warrants a deliberate turn toward his "other" audience and its constituency politics.[7]

In the first instance, one notes that it is not colonialism alone that "made the 'colonies' themselves, and even more, large tracts

of the 'post-colonial' world, always already 'diasporic' in relation to what might be thought of as their cultures of origin" (250); nor was it the only factor in the constitution of a hybrid subjectivity in the postcolony. In the long view taken by Rushdie in some of his subcontinental fiction, and indeed by both Mistry and Roy as well, migration and hybridity are a part of the subcontinent's distant and not just recent postcolonial past; hybrid at source, the Westward-bound migrant only enters another dimension of change. The literary hybridity alluded to by Leela Gandhi is not only one produced by colonial interaction but is itself a hybrid of various subcontinental influences. If anything, it is undue emphasis on the British colonial experience and its epistemic regimes that threaten to forestall a richer understanding of subcontinental history. Aware of this tendency to adumbrate hybridity in terms of relative purity at the source and the destination, Rushdie has repeatedly repudiated the thinness of narrowly defined national authenticity:

> As far as India is concerned, anyway—it is completely fallacious to suppose that there is such a thing as a pure, unalloyed tradition from which to draw. The only people who seriously believe this are religious extremists. (*Imaginary Homelands* 67)

Within the context of subcontinental politics, the dangers of purist thinking assume ever more minatory proportions, as explored by Rushdie more fully in *The Moor's Last Sigh* than in any of his other works. Rushdie's descriptions of Indian culture in earlier works is also premised on a foundational sense of its cultural hybridity:

> The . . . nature of Indian culture has always been multiplicity and plurality and

> mingling. Indians . . . assimilate the elements that are interesting and reject the rest. So Indian culture is not purist; the people . . . who talk most violently about purism in Indian culture tend to be Hindu religious extremists, and in Pakistan, similarly, the people who talk about a pure culture tend to be Muslim religious extremists. (Rushdie, "*Midnight's Children* and *Shame*" 10–11)

Rushdie's India begins neither with the postcolonial moment nor with British colonialism; the story of his India, produced from a commitment to "long" memory, is nevertheless also set in a dimension beyond time (in ways both similar and dissimilar to Roy's treatment of Kerala in *The God of Small Things*), creating the phenomenon of temporal hybridity and border crossing.

The constant two-way migration between the ideological and temporal zones produced by the encounter with modernity is also a space for the creation of newness and startling modes of adaptation. Rushdie's view of India as a mongrel reality encompasses this dimension as well, as demonstrated by his frequent references to the coexistence of variant temporal realities. In *Midnight's Children* Saleem submits that "no people whose word for 'yesterday' is the same as their word for 'tomorrow' can be said to have a firm grip on the time" (123). In *The Moor's Last Sigh,* the narrator observes: "There is a certain endemic vagueness in Bombay on the subject of time past: ask a man how long he's been in business and he'll answer, 'Long.'—Very well, Sir, how old is your house?— 'Old. From old time'" (180). Elsewhere, Rushdie suggests that "it may be argued that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, and that its loss is part of our common humanity" (*Imaginary Homelands* 12). Each of these perceptions, however, must contend with modern clock time for "now the remorseless ticktock reasserts itself" (*Midnight's Children*

128). The struggle for the definitive version of the modern Indian nation is itself a consequence of this other mode of migratory and hybrid existence that must capitulate to the pressing need to control and regulate the excess of possibilities. Now the remorseless ticktock reasserts itself.

As if in response, every given protagonist in Rushdie's subcontinental novels is a cultural and/or biological hybrid, and the novels abound in characters produced by ancient migrations. Rushdie's insistence on a culturally hybrid nation is no mere perceptual preference; he has long held the view that "the idea of a pure culture is something which in India is, let's say even *politically* important to resist" ("Midnight's Children and Shame" 11; emphasis mine). His insistence on migration, hybridity, and diachrony is a message as much to those attempting to configure contemporary Indian identity along purist lines as it is to those who conceive of the native as a static, unchanging, terrigenous mold-hugger. However, as I argue in the course of my discussion of *The Moor's Last Sigh,* Rushdie's treatment of hybridity and polyglossia takes a new turn in this novel, demonstrating a more thoughtful consideration and understanding; here Rushdie evinces a far more complicated stance toward hybridity. Thus far a predictable defender of pluralism, here Rushdie embarks—admittedly in a mood of trademark tolerance—on an examination of the hazards of indeterminacy and cultural pluralism under pressure from the need to articulate a modern, determinate identity.

Early in the novel, one finds the usual exhortations to remember India in terms of its hybrid identity:

> Christians, Portuguese and Jews; Chinese tiles promoting godless views; pushy ladies, skirts-not-saris, Spanish shenanigans, Moorish crowns . . . can this really be India? *Bharat-mata, Hindustan-hamara,* is this the place? . . . Are not my personages Indian, every one? Well, then:

> this too is an Indian yarn. (87)

Minorities, too, are represented as varied and hybrid in this elaborate textual project of "unforgetting":

> But there are many Christianities here in Cochin, Catholic and Syriac Orthodox and Nestorian, there are midnight masses where incense chokes the lungs, there are priests with thirteen crosses on their caps to symbolise Jesus and the Apostles, there are wars between the denominations, R.C. v. Syriac, and *everyone* agrees the Nestorians are no sort of Christians. (62)

Moreover, contentious and warring though the factions may be, theirs is a Christmas perhaps more in keeping with its origins than that hybridized in its invention for Northern climes:

> Christmas, that Northern invention, that tale of snow and stockings, of merry fires and reindeer, Latin carols and *O Tannenbaum,* of evergreen trees and Sante Klaas with his little piccanniny "helpers," is restored by tropical heat to something like its origins, for whatever else the Infant Jesus may or may not have been, he was a hot-weather babe; however poor his manger, it wasn't *cold;* and if Wise

> Men came . . . they came, let's not forget it, from the East. (62)

Rushdie's scheme of a long memory for India, going back to the purported beginning of time—the initiation of the Christian calendar in the passage above—goes even further back as he reports on a prior population related to Christianity:

> They have almost all gone now, the Jews of Cochin. Less than fifty of them remaining, and the young departed to Israel. It is the last generation; arrangements have been made for the synagogue to be taken over by the government of the State of Kerala, which will run it as a museum. . . . This, too, is an extinction to be mourned; not an extermination, such as occurred elsewhere, but the end, nevertheless, of a story that took two thousand years to tell. (119)

The constellative juxtaposition of the holocaust with the vanishing of the Jewish population from Kerala performs one of those "evanescent similarities" Benjamin speaks of in "On the Mimetic Faculty," prompting a montage-like view of nonsynchronous realities within a singular visual frame (*Reflections* 314).[8] Many realities and many centuries jostle each other in the crowd of memories and beliefs that comprise the national story. Integral to Rushdie's insistence that "this, too," a slow extinction that lacks the drama or the swiftness or the scale that would draw our attention, "is an extinction to be mourned" is the suppression of

that "other" extermination that remains nameless, but with which this slow seeping away is joined in a conceptual montage that can create the impression—from a long historical vantage point—of a steady and devastating stream of tragedy. Bemoaning the inability to mourn the losses that become visible only from this stance, the text offers a silent indictment of the slow accrual of prejudices that harbor the ingredients of the tragedy that is now to come if we fail to recognize its "antecedent." The method used by the narrator here finds remarkable resonance with Benjamin's proposition in "Theses on the Philosophy of History":

> Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian . . . grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. (*Illuminations* 263)

Recognizing the shape of what was an invisible extinction in casting his eyes backward, the narrator seems to urge the reader to see the shape of the tragedy to come in the refusal to recognize the nation as "essentially" hybrid. The author's use of a technique of montage to illuminate the tragedy already written into an untold, older story is balanced at the end of the book by its use to show the redemptive possibilities that also become revealed in the overlaying of a different moment onto the present.

It is Aurora da Gama who serves as the conduit—arguably—for many of the author's beliefs about the relation of art to a hybrid Indian culture and the challenges of representing it in its varieties

and in the context of changing national politics. In one of many ecphrastic passages in Rushdie's novels, the Indian nation is presented as "the great swarm of being" in one of Aurora's earliest artistic efforts. Among the crowd in Aurora's painting are figures from recent and distant history. Camoens trembles to see "it was Mother India herself" (60). Prior to independence, Aurora's early paintings attempt to capture, "like a lizard on the wall," the reality of Indian life as she sees it on the streets; beneath her representations lies

> her own sense of the inadequacy of the world, of its failure to live up to her expectations, so that her own disappointment with reality, her anger at its wrongness, mirrored her subjects', and made her sketches not merely reportorial, but personal, with a violent, breakneck passion of line that had the force of a physical assault. (131)

After Independence, we are told that "Aurora fell into a deep creative confusion, a semi-paralysis born of an uncertainty not merely about realism but about the nature of the real itself" (173). In a playful series of observations clearly intended to recall his own experiences as a writer, the narrator observes:

> It was easy for an artist to lose her identity at a time when so many thinkers believed that the poignancy and passion of the country's immense life could only be represented by a kind of selfless, dedicated—even patriotic—mimesis.

(173)

Yet it is the fabulous that attracted attention. The narrator notes that even in the work of "committed realists" like "Premchand and Saadat Hasan Manto and Mulk Raj Anand and Ismat Chugtai . . . there were elements of the fabulous" (173). It is the "epic-fabulist manner" that captures "the dream-like wonder of the waking world" that Aurora eventually settles on as expressive of "her true nature" (174). She finds herself returning "obsessively to the mythic-romantic mode in which history, family, politics and fantasy jostled each other like the great crowds at V.T. or Churchgate Stations" (203–4). In the dream-worlds represented in her paintings, several "worlds collide" (226). The narrator describes these as "polemical pictures" that were intended not only to represent a fullness, but also something missing that can only be dreamt or imagined:

> In a way these were polemical pictures, in a way they were an attempt to create a romantic myth of the plural, hybrid nation: she was using Arab Spain to re-imagine India, and this land-sea-scape in which the land could be fluid and the sea stone-dry was her metaphor—idealised? sentimental? probably—of the present, and the future, that she hoped would evolve. (227)

Many of the "high-energy, apocalyptic canvases" are superchromatic and wishful national allegories but they also depict her "Cassandran fears for the nation" (236).

The high energy and implied plenitude of this representation coupled with the infinite capacity to generate new stories is not,

however, without its drawbacks. Its fragility is indicated in the frank admission of its status as "romantic myth." Here *The Moor's Last Sigh* signals a departure from unqualified advocacy of plurality. For the author who averred that the "broken mirror may actually be as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed" (*Imaginary Homelands* 12), that the "the novel has always been *about* the way in which different languages, values and narratives quarrel, and about the shifting relations between them" (420), that Saleem's "story is not history, but it plays with historical shapes" (25), and warns us, through Iff, "Believe in your own eyes, and you'll get into a lot of trouble" (*Haroun* 63), it is a significant deviation to state in *The Moor's Last Sigh:*

> It did not fail to occur to me . . . that what had happened was, in a way, a defeat for the pluralist philosophy on which we had all been raised. For the matter of Uma Sarasvati it had been the pluralist Uma, with her multiple selves, her highly inventive commitment to the infinite malleability of the real, her modernistically provisional sense of truth, who had turned out to be the bad egg; and Aurora had fried her—Aurora, that lifelong advocate of the many against the one, had with Minto's help discovered some fundamental verities, and had therefore been in the right. The story of my love-life thus became a bitter parable, one whose ironies Raman Fielding would have relished, for in it the polarity between good and evil was reversed.

It is the tenebrous surround of pluralism and provisionality that are evoked for contemplation now as the narrator faces one possible consequence of a world unmoored (the pun be pardoned) from certainty. If conventional morality is irrelevant, every interpretation must be permitted its day, and if truth is no longer available as a final court of appeal, what absolute value does one resort to? We are told in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* that the excessively voluble Guppees who will permit anything in the name of free speech finally have their day when they confront the Chupwalas: The Guppees prove themselves worthy opponents in pitched battle: "All those arguments and debates, all that openness, had created powerful bonds of fellowship between them" (185). The Chupwalas, on the other hand, "turned out to be a disunited rabble, . . . their habits of secrecy had made them suspicious and distrustful of one other" (185). The appropriation by the so-called bad guys of a fecund store of stories, thus far associated with a positive capacity for regeneration, overtly challenges the implicit association of plurality with the positive.

The freedom from adherence to any absolute standard (of truth or any other value) is what now permits all of history to be available for refashioning not just by a liberal coterie that believes in pluralism but by any opportunist who has learned of the power of stories. By the time he gets to *The Moor's Last Sigh,* Rushdie is far more interested in the degree to which Hindu fundamentalism had begun to exploit the instability of the historical record. Tongue in cheek, Zeeny Vakil bluntly states, "'I blame fiction . . . The followers of one fiction knock down another piece of make-believe, and bingo! It's war!'" (351). Hobbled by his or her own long-espoused beliefs, the liberal pluralist is unable to respond with any absolute counternarrative that can be offered as a coherent and invariable option to the growing hegemony of a narrative created for purposes of control and domination. The multiple etymologies of Indian culture and the plethora of available fictions of identity permit relativism not only to the expansive pluralist but also to the fundamentalist seeking a preferred version on the grounds that if facts are disputable, the future must now rest on faith. The stunning realization offered by

the writer here is that the imagination and violence can grow in the same soil. Both belong to the creative impulse Marx identifies in human nature, heading under the banner of late capitalism, creatively enough, toward its own undoing.

The rise of the Hindu nationalist movement might be located in the precise context of the struggle for the right fiction for the nation in the chaos produced by what Rushdie elsewhere calls the "Coca-Colonization" of the planet (*Satanic Verses* 406). Constantly prodded to make a final crossing into modernity, the postcolony still struggling to manufacture a nuclear identity is aware of the need to generate hegemonic rather than dispersed narratives in order to create an aggregate communal self that can survive as coherent and plausible within the postcolony and on the global stage where migrant postcolonials also have an investment in homeland nationalism. Busy making history from fragments of stories in its past, at a time of increasing globalization, emerging national hegemonies based on religious or uniquely cultural values tap into mass media technology's potential for social thought control while reinforcing traditionalism and anti-imperialism. This, too, one acknowledges, is a mode of the functioning of native intelligence. The Rushdie affair as well as the rise of religious nationalisms have taught us that in the arena of global mass communication, nativists and fundamentalists are also gaining ground. The fertile imagination and endless possibilities for regeneration afforded by Indian culture are now being forced through the cold filter of a purposeful intelligence bent on exploiting its capacity for supporting new versions. But, as Neil Postman reminds us in *Technopoly,* "Once a technology is admitted, it plays out its hand; it does what it is designed to do" (7).

The refunctioning of information technology in the hands of rising fascist movements in the precise context of economic and cultural globalization should alert us to the fact that these phenomena, far from being cloistered and discrete, are all managed and programmed by the broadcasting machine to whose ideology they subscribe. In the precise context of the rise of Hindu fundamentalism, the kinetic dynamics of stories and history is particularly significant. Deploying selected portions of mythological texts, the movement currently in progress has tried to mobilize a massive right-wing assault against non-Hindu

minorities. The project is no less than to redefine India as a Hindu nation.[9] Rushdie puts the message of the movement in Raman Fielding's words: "Now our freedom, our beloved nation, is buried beneath the things the invaders have built. The true nation is what we must reclaim from beneath the layers of alien empires" (299).

New developments in the interactions between technology and culture in the First and Third Worlds are requiring us to examine the idea of power on multiple rather than polar axes. While global capitalism and what are seen as broadcast invasions from the skies in the Third World threaten to overwhelm local cultures with a uniformity of images, regressive fundamentalisms have countered by drawing upon the techno-cultural complex hitherto used by the state and the multinational corporation to further its own hegemonic designs. Becoming manipulators of the broadcasting machine, however, these movements plug into a "thing" larger than the state, larger than themselves, and larger than the local context in which they are thought to arise.

A mediological survey of the matter reveals the careful process by which fundamentalists have achieved remarkable consensus in the Hindu community in its construction of a story to live by and to die, not to mention kill, for. Mediology, as Regis Debray defines it, is the examination of the "relations between the higher social functions (religion, politics, ideology and mental attitudes) and the technical structure used for the transmission of information" (5). The development of the "Third World" problem of fundamentalist nationalism in the frame of global capitalism on the one hand and the escalating network of information technologies on the other reveals the concurrent evolution of the Ram/ RAM Rajya in India and its diasporic outreach. The rhetoric of Hindu nationalism deploys the trope of family, capitalizing on the emotional resonance of the private contract of the family while disseminating its message within the public fora of pedagogic and instructional materials. In states where the Bharatiya Janata Party has come to power, rewriting of history textbooks is a priority project. Aware of the potential of the broadcasting machine, the movement uses comic books, pamphlets, posters, advertisements, audio and video cassettes and marshals the rage of large congregations through inflammatory public speeches with catchy slogans. Vigorous crusades in the print and electronic media in the West have also whipped up considerable overseas support from nonresident

Indian populations.

Moving from tale, rumor, gossip, and from possible to plausible theory into the authoritative account, the movement has turned story into history through the vast engines of the broadcasting machine, effecting along the way a slight rise in literacy. The Hindu movement's message is not, however, either new or aberrant in Indian history. If nineteenth-century nationalists and Mahatma Gandhi were the first to tap into the Ram story as a rallying device, postindependence filmmakers, some of them Muslim, have also helped to broadcast and consolidate the myth of Ram as national rather than Hindu hero and Sita as the ideal woman. Following the divisive years of the Emergency period imposed by Indira Gandhi, the ruling party in the congress made aggressive use of satellite technology, which had already brought more than 70 percent of the country under the direct ideological management of the state, to homogenize the many versions of the Ram story through the narcotizing medium of state television. The commercialization of state television and the privileging of the market as regulator of cultural needs subsequently ensured that the bourgeois middle-class notion of Indian identity as generically Hindu has remained dominant. If the sacral ontologies of death and infernal disorder were appropriated within a narrative of abstract nationhood, they have now been reinvoked in the religious nationalism of the Hindu right that conjures up and then promises to allay an impending national chaos in the absence of a deistic glue.

In other words, this boulder of history has been gaining momentum steadily through the course of national politics; sounded early in Gandhi's admittedly secular nationalist but undeniably Hindu rhetoric, the name of Ram drowns out other religious heroes to evolve into the "battering Ram" of the present day (*The Moor* 56). The divisory strategies used by Indira Gandhi during the Emergency initiated a new phase of identitarian politics: "Before the Emergency," the narrator of *Moor* tells us, "we were Indians. After it we were Christian Jews" (235). This statement is followed in the text by the grimly onomatopoeic aside: "Plank, plonk, plink" (235). Once on the roll, the boulder brooks no questions. *Chaque jours vers l'Enfer nous descendons un pas.* Lest we fail to see into the distance the shape of what lies in waiting, the narrator has already reminded us of another

extinction that we did not recognize, but must learn to mourn.

One of the pivotal moments in the history of the movement was the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya in 1992, followed by bloody Hindu-Muslim riots and the explosion in Bombay of a series of bombs— events that are documented by Rushdie in the novel without his characteristic ambiguity about fact and fiction.[10] Fundamentalists claim that a mosque was built on a sacred site in Ayodhya where a temple celebrating the birth of Ram existed before 1528, and that Babar, a king of Turko-Mongol heritage, announced his conquest of India by building this mosque. In fact, "Where (and whether) Ram was actually born . . . are matters of dispute for historians" (Varshney 11). But this is an objection that strengthens rather than attenuates the force of the story in circulation. Countering the mosque committee's call for proof that a temple was demolished on the site, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has argued that the birthplace of Ram is a matter of faith. Sprinkling the story with random and selective references to historical personages and places, but relying for the most part on the undeniable force of faith, VHP members have been able to convince a surprising portion of the Hindu population of all classes that historical fact is irrelevant when it comes to matters of faith. "The gap between belief and evidence, has, finally, led to the argument by some historians that the 'oral history' or 'popular tradition' of the town supports the existence of the temple, though 'documentary history' does not" (Varshney 11).

What Rushdie seems uncannily aware of is that gaps between story and history are absorbed within the larger engines of a broadcasting machine that allows infinite versions and reproducibility but whose ideology, shaped by market considerations and the struggle for ideological and material control, promotes uniformity at some operational level. This should not suggest a homogeneity of interests in the movement that cuts across class and national lines and whose subscriptions are at once modernist and traditionalist, environmentalist and progressivist; its subscribers at once anticorruption and corrupt, anticrime and violent, inclusivist and bigoted, antisecular and, curiously, neosecular. What it suggests is the logic of the machine. Drawing unexpected allies, opportunists and poseurs, religious zealots and businessmen, vagrants and brahmins, women and professionals who attach themselves to any available node, the

machine is greased by that particularly Indian particular: corruption. Mere facts cannot stay the course of the machine in its new character. The narrator in *The Moor's Last Sigh* begins to argue that since Ram is an incarnation of Vishnu, the most metamorphic of gods, "The true 'rule of Ram' should therefore, surely be premised on the mutating, inconstant, shape-shifting realities of human nature— and not only human nature, but divine as well. This thing being advocated in the great god's name flew in the face of his essence as well as ours," but then he checks himself and concedes that "when the boulder of history begins to roll, nobody is interested in discussing such fragile points. The *juggernaut* is loose" (351). At other points in the novel Rushdie inserts factual arguments—that Hinduism is monotheistic and pluralistic and has many sacred texts beyond the *Ramayana,* that Ram is a north Indian rather than pan-Indian deity—but the machine has its own infernal logic. Now uncontrollable, the national organism itself is loaded with the weapons of hate and war. In Rushdie's narrative, the demagogue Fielding is himself destroyed by the excess of a war machine he had thought to control, as the city, too, the Bombay that was central, the very crossroads of imponderably hybrid Indian cultures, begins to explode on itself.

The narrator's references to corruption and his surprising claim to a Jewish identity when confronted with his father Abraham's willingness to "blow into more bits than Rajiv" the enemies of "certain oil-rich countries" suggest an apprehension that the infernal machine in motion is none other than capitalism itself. Abraham's declaration of a supreme identity that trumps religion —"I am a business person"—and his confession of motivation —"What there is to do, I do"—proclaim the market as the new god on the horizon and the invisible hand as the capitalist rather than the divine motivator (336). "Money economy," as Simmel reminds us, connects intrinsically with the dominance of rational intellect: "Money is concerned only with what is common to all: it asks for the exchange value, it reduces all quality and individuality to the question; How much?" (411). With its "colorlessness and indifference," money "becomes the common denominator of all values" (414). Infinitely more inspiring than the narratives of traditional religions, profit appears as the new prophet preaching the morality of self-interest. "The global capital of Millennium Three" is inaugurated by a new regime: "Not Ram Rajya but RAM

Rajya—that is our ace in the hole" (342, 343). "His refusal to talk about his past, the fluidity of his changes of stride as he tried to bewitch and woo, the cold calculation of his moves" qualify Adam, the new Indian man, "the fast-track Infobahni," as the standard bearer of the coming system as the rightful "heir" of Abraham who adopts him as his son (354, 359).

Aurora, that astute observer of Indian life, is dead by the time these events come to pass, but she has already captured the beginnings of this descent into hell. Hybridity, in the artist's reckoning in her final pictures, now appears in terms of a Baudelairean *fleur du mal:*

> The Moor-figure . . . appeared to lose, in these last pictures, his previous metaphorical role as a unifier of opposites, a standard-bearer of pluralism, ceasing to stand as a symbol . . . of the new nation, and being transformed, instead, into a semi-allegorical figure of decay. Aurora had apparently decided that the ideas of impurity, cultural admixture and melange which had been, for most of her creative life, the closest things she had found to a notion of the Good, were in fact capable of distortion, and contained a potential for darkness as well as for light. This "black Moor" was a new imagining of the idea of the hybrid—a Baudelairean flower, it could not be too far-fetched to suggest, of evil:

Aux objets répugnants nous trouvons
des appas;
Chaque jours vers l'Enfer nous
descendons un pas,
Sans horreur,à travers des ténèbres qui
puent. (The Flowers of Evil 303)

These lines, taken from the fourth stanza of Baudelaire's poem "Au Lecteur," omit the crucial first line, "*C'est le Diable qui tient les fils qui nous remuent,*" although the devil is suggested in the syncopated "evil." The idea of being orchestrated by a force beyond our comprehension, an incalculable power beyond the vocabulary of modern belief systems that can no longer fathom the notion of the devil, is rarely entertained in contemporary accounts. The narrator Moor seems ready to reintroduce the possibility into the discussion; as he begins to learn more about his father's underworld connections, he asks, "and if the reality of our being is that so many covert truths exist behind Maya-veils of unknowing and illusion, then why not Heaven and Hell, too? Why not God and the Devil and the whole blest-damned thing?" (334–45). Nor is this an ultra-Levantine devil that is only found East of the civil European line; Rushdie makes an explicit conjunction between the Eastern and Western sort of monstrosity: "But the point is they are not inhuman, these Mainduck-style Hitlers, and it is in their humanity that we must locate our collective guilt, humanity's guilt for human being's misdeeds; for if they are just monsters—if it is just a question of King Kong and Godzilla wreaking havoc until the aeroplanes bring them down—then the rest of us are excused" (297).

Monstrosity is thus offered not as aberration but as a fundamental component of humanity, and guilt as a collective matter of shame built out of sins of commission or omission. Well beyond the formulation of self-interest alone is the "thing" which must be reckoned with before one begins the quest for solutions. An attempt to understand the source of this monstrosity points us in several directions at once:

There are always reasons. You can get reasons in any chor

bazaar, any thieves' market, reasons by the bunch, ten chips the dozen. Reasons are cheap, cheap as politicians' answers, they come tripping off the tongue: *I did it for the money, the uniform, the togetherness, the family, the race, the nation, the god.* (312)

What is at the root? It is religion but not only religion, class but not only class, masculism but not only gender conflicts, colonialism but not only colonialism, global capitalism but not only that, and so on. The narrator eventually rejects these as misleading tergiversations that constitute false reasoning. "What truly drives us," the narrator reveals, "is not to be found in any such bazaar-bought words. Our engines are stranger and use darker fuel" (312). Tapping into a yearning for "the outrageous, the outsize, the out-of-bounds," the machine unleashes the "wild potency" trapped under the civil norm (305). It is the "thing" Rushdie tells us: "There is a thing that burst out of us at times, a thing that lives in us, eating our food, breathing our air, looking out through our eyes, and when it comes out to play nobody is immune; possessed, we turn murderously upon one another . . . neighbour against thing-ridden neighbour" (36).

Although Rushdie does not quote the ultimate lines of Baudelaire's poem, the aforementioned observations are as preemptive as the latter's outright denunciation of our attempt to distance ourselves from the dainty monster we all share:

> *C'est l'Ennui!—l'oeil chargé d'un pleur involontaire*
> *Il rêve d'échafauds en fumant son houka.*
> *Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat,*
> *—Hypocrite lecteur,—mon semblable,—mon frère!*

The famous apostrophe of the last line draws the reader into the drama in progress, much as Rushdie too insists on the shared fate and responsibility of us all, of human nature itself, driven by some strange, "surnatural"—to use a term from Baudelaire's vocabulary —engine caught in the current of the times. The narrator concedes

as much:

> I'll tell you what I think—what, in spite of a lifetime's conditioning against the supernatural, I cannot stop believing: something started when Aurora Zogoiby fell—not just feud, but a lengthening, widening tear in the fabric of all our lives. (352)

The spleen "that kills interest and receptiveness," as Benjamin phrases it, would make the reader turn away and dissociate himself from the tragedies of a fragmented and bewildering contemporary life (*Illuminations* 157). But Rushdie refuses to segregate causes and perpetrators. Irresistibly drawn to the repugnant, the national body's lack of will, he seems to suggest, joins with the malignant forces of the times to produce the horrors described in the novel. Horror combined with apathy and weakness draw the city, zombie-like, toward the abyss:

> When life became so cheap, when heads were bouncing across the maidans and headless bodies dancing in the street, how to care about any single early exit? How to care about the imminent probability of one's own? After each monstrosity came a greater; like true addicts, we seemed to need each increased dose. (374)

The narrator ascribes an ambiguous agency to this unknown force that compels when he explains that "a tragedy was taking place all

right, a national tragedy on a grand scale, but those of us who played our parts were—let me put it bluntly—clowns. Clowns! Burlesque buffoons, drafted into history's theatre on account of the lack of greater men" (352). *C'est le Diable qui tient les fils qui nous remuent.* Under the thin veneer of civilization lie unknown and foul depths: "Civilisation is the sleight of hand that conceals our natures from ourselves" (365). One recalls that the etymology of hypocrite, too, suggests the actor, the mask-wearer.

> The barbarians were not only at our gates but within our skins. . . . The explosions were our own evil—no need to look for foreign explanations, though there was and is evil beyond our frontiers as well as within. (372)

In ripping off the mask, the narrator obliges us to look in the face that which the rhetoric of progress and civilization and bourgeois sorcery will not let us see. The unveiling of the naked truth is a crucial preliminary to self-knowledge, and the ability to call defeat by its name preparatory, as Jameson suggests, to the possibility of utopian thinking.[11]

In his essay, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Benjamin quotes an intriguing description of London by Engels in *The Condition of the Working Class in England:*

> Only when one has tramped the pavements of the main streets for a few days does one notice that these Londoners have had to sacrifice what is best in human nature in order to create all the wonders of civilization with which their city teems. . . . The greater the number of

> people that are packed into a tiny space, the more repulsive and offensive becomes the brutal indifference, the unfeeling concentration of each person on his private affairs. (168–69)

Although Rushdie purports to describe a national problem, it is the city of Bombay that he chooses for his ruminations on human nature and the predicament of a nation caught in the enticements and vulgarity of contemporary forces. Too, although the phrase will not appear till *The Ground beneath Her Feet,* the poignant and apocalyptic refrain, "The best in our natures is drowning in the worst," reminiscent of Engels' formulation, is suggested in the many references to human nature in *The Moor's Last Sigh* as well and in the claim that "the best, and worst, were in us, and fought in us, as they fought in the land at large. In some of us, the worst triumphed" (131, 376). The ambiguities and contradictory impulses of human nature are central to Rushdie's understanding of the problems of ongoing modernity. Alienation from one's original nature and a desperate longing for the forgotten better part of nature surface as powerful motifs throughout Rushdie's work.

In his remarkable discussion of aesthetics and politics in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic,* Terry Eagleton draws our attention to the notion of aesthetic fulfillment as a political analog; the question of pleasure thus involves "what it is to live well, to attain happiness and serenity, at the level of a whole society" (413). The aesthetic sense of satisfaction, far from being inimical to the political and ethical, enacts at the level of society itself "the best possibilities" of human nature through the principles of creativity and pleasure (413). Ethical action is relocated in this formulation to the level of the senses and of nature itself. Rushdie's requiem for this capacity in human nature now caught in the storm of vulgar forces is elaborated, as I go on to explain, through meditations on love and death, both transcendent values in the philosophical scheme.

The alliance of history and human hubris in the volatile crucible of contemporary culture produces a dense mix so

mutually interpenetrated as to render questionable any quest for absolute explanation. Like Baudelaire more than a century before him, Rushdie, too, is here a poet of the streets of a city confronting new forces. The city and its masses, the narrator among them, have developed a reciprocity that makes it, their nature, and the violence that destroys it, all part of one organic story: “Bombay was central; all rivers flowed into its human sea. It was an ocean of stories; we were all its narrators, and everybody talked at once” (350). In an unexpected and mixed personification following upon its analogy with the sea, Bombay becomes a body that bleeds, that dies: “Who,” asks the narrator, “murdered my home?” (372). The aesthetic move of personifying the city imbues it with a pulsating life and vivacity; it is at the primitive level of the body itself that the violence and the disorder of a world gone wrong must be felt. It is not simply the experience of bomb explosions that is described here but an entire world of primitive drives and of the pain and loss that are felt in the guts and enacted in the force of human nature. “What avenging demon bestrode the horizon, raining fire upon our heads?,” demands the narrator (372). “Hindus and Muslims were both attacked,” he continues. “We were our own wooden horses, each of us full of our doom” (372). The originary impulse is presented as irrelevant. Perhaps it was Abraham, his father, who lit the fuse or his partner, underworld Don Scar. Who cares, he asks, if it was “these fanatics or those, our crazies or yours; but the explosives burst out of our very own bodies. We were both the bombers and the bombs” since “catastrophe had become the city’s habit, and we were all its users, its zombies” (372, 374). As described in the work of Benjamin, the city here functions as a metaphor for human alienation. It is not surprising that the city and the narrator should both begin to come undone together: “The city I knew was dying. The body I inhabited, ditto” (374). As he turns away from the scene of a destroyed city in a final alienation, he ruefully admits that a world and vision may have ended but “the end of a world is not the end of the world” (376). The novel ends with a farewell, the keys of a lost kingdom turned in even as Boabdil Zogoiby the unlucky last sultan of the Nasrid dynasty had relinquished his keys to a Spanish queen some centuries ago.

Confronted with the incomprehensible, uninterested in prying apart cause and effect, unpersuaded by the usual attempts to

justify the violence of contemporary communal politics, unable to separate history and the individual body and spirit, the author gives us neither social realism nor the solution. Instead, the very act of representing reality through the imaginative mode inculpates it. The author can neither retreat from "the unceasing storm, the continual quarrel, the dialectic of history" nor solve its internecine quarrels, at least not in the language of the given reality (*Imaginary Homelands* 100). Instead, he proposes two curiously evasive moves in which eros and thanatos appear as the other forces and desires that belong to human nature along with the dainty monster.[12] Both are presented in escapist modes in which the narrator either expresses the need to elude the determinism of history and to exist as pure intelligence unplugged from its shocking current or conjures up a faded and tearful dream in which the contradictions of history can be sunk. Love, dreams, and death are conjoined as the author uses various characters in the novel to project these longings. It is in a nightmare-dream that Oliver D'Aeth ("Allover Death" as Aurora mockingly calls him) tells Aurora, "'We will never gain our humanity until we lose our skins'" (95). Aware perhaps of the overly grandiose nature of the claim, the narrator adds the following: "When he woke he was not sure whether the dream had been inspired by his faith in the oneness of mankind, or by the photophobia that made his skin torment him so: whether it was a heroic vision or a banality" (95). In another reference, it is the Moor himself who conveys these desires:

> When I was young I used to dream . . . like photophobic, God-bothered Oliver D'Aeth—of peeling off my skin plantain-fashion, of going forth naked into the world, like the anatomy illustration from *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* all ganglions, ligaments, nervous pathways and veins, set free from the otherwise inescapable jails of colour, race and clan. (In another

> version of the dream I would be able to peel away more than skin, I would float free of flesh, skin and bones, having become an intelligence or a feeling set loose in the world, at play in its fields, like a science-fiction glow which needed no physical form). (136)

Again, lest the reader be tempted to dismiss these meditations as irresponsible and delusionary ventriloquism on the author's behalf, the narrator adds, "In the waking world a man's not as easy to flay as a banana, no matter how ripe he be" (137). Later, he again acknowledges these wishes as untenable in a world afflicted by the realities of history:

> In Indian country, there was no room for a man who didn't want to belong to a tribe, who dreamed of moving beyond; of peeling off his skin and revealing his secret identity—the secret, that is, of the identity of all men—of standing before the war-painted braves to unveil the flayed and naked unity of the flesh. (414)[13]

Once again, the author does not so much deny historical determinism as reject its defining confinements. Compare these remarks to Frantz Fanon's observations in *Black Skin, White Masks:*

> The body of history does not determine a

> single one of my actions.
>
> I am my own foundation.
>
> And it is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate the cycle of my freedom. (231)

Rushdie's stray ruminations on the subject in history also express the wish to be unburdened of its oppressive weight, but his position is not so much to escape its "instrumental hypothesis" in any revolutionary sense or to assert the force of individual will. It is, rather, a longing for a world without history, or even before history, a logical and practical impossibility, even in his own reckoning. Hence the immediate disavowal and sober dismissal of the longing. If Fanon's is a going beyond, a transcendence in fact, Rushdie's, ultimately, will be a return to the past, from which to excavate an imperfect and unrealized possibility. If Fanon looks to tear through the fabric of history to emerge unfettered on the other side, the narrator-author in Rushdie's formulation can only cower before its might, eventually to return within its fold into a moment that appeared to have potential, a tear in its unrelentingly close fabric that reveals a prospect that held promise but would remain unfulfilled. The desire is not for escape from the world but into that world that is not yet but could have been. In Adorno's formulation, "Artworks recall the theologumenon that in the redeemed world everything would be as it is and yet wholly other" (*Aesthetic Theory* 6).

The author's final move is to leave us with the vision of a potential lost through time and through its own insufficient realization—a might-havebeen utopia, suggested through a new mode of writing reliant on a visual logic.[14] Caught in the realm of the beyond, prematurely post mature, a civilizational progeria traps us in a perpetual "world-in-motion," to use Benedict Anderson's phrase, preventing the crucial backward glance ("Nationalism" 117). "In the fast lane, on the fast track, ahead of [his] time . . . perpetually out of breath," the hapless protagonist of *The Moor's Last Sigh* asks the reader, "How many of us feel, these days, that something that has passed too quickly is ending: a

moment of life, a period of history, an idea of civilisation, a twist in the turning of the unconcerned world?" (161, 145). In the face of this double-speed existence so fast that we can scarcely look around, still less look back, the narrator sinks his faith in a lost history and a lost possibility symbolized by that monument to syncretic coexistence, the Alhambra. In the face of the heightened pace of life, so emblematically captured in the Moor's suffering from accelerated aging, the author effects his own aesthetic mode of what David Harvey refers to as "time-space compression." This is achieved through a somewhat transparently modernist strategy of montage as two spaces and times are bred into each other, informing the present through a past that never really was. What the author recuperates is not a lost reality but a forfeited promise that exists in the idea of Alhambra as an idealized concept, a ruin among things as an allegory is to thought:

> The Alhambra, Europe's red fort, sister to Delhi's and Agra's—the palace of interlocking forms and secret wisdom, of pleasure-courts and water-gardens, that monument to a lost possibility that nevertheless has gone on standing, long after its conquerors have fallen; like a testament to lost but sweetest love, to the love that endures beyond defeat, beyond annihilation, beyond despair; to the defeated love that is greater than what defeats it, to that most profound of our needs, to our need for flowing together, for putting an end to frontiers, for the dropping of the boundaries of the self. Yes, I have seen it across an oceanic plain, though it has not been given to me to

> walk in its noble courts. I watch it vanish in the twilight, and in its fading it brings tears to my eyes. (433)

The earlier reference to Benjamin's famous assertion, "Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realms of things," draws attention to the way in which Rushdie makes a ruin itself the allegory for a lost possibility we can now only dimly glimpse from the vantage point of our damaged lives (*The Origin of German Tragic Drama* 66). Visually superimposed onto each other, the Alhambra and the Red Forts at Delhi and Agra (and perhaps even the echo of Ayodhya's Babri Masjid) create a hybrid moment of palimpsestic possibility that suggest an alternative future that has not come to pass.[15] The visual game generated by this uncanny mirroring of history unleashes a creative possibility that exercises perception but is clearly hybridized beyond belief.

One asks, as Rushdie himself might, "Is this it?" Where is the poet's ensign, the perception of the whole, the answer to the oneiroid questions posed by a monstrous history? Adorno reminds us that "to survive reality at its most extreme and grim, artworks that do not want to sell themselves as consolation must equate themselves with that reality" (*Aesthetic Theory* 39). If there is a utopia, it exists, for Adorno and Marcuse as it did for Benjamin, in aesthetic imagination usually as a possibility beyond historical realization. Although the novel tackles the depredations of capitalism directly, it also suggests that a change in the relations of production cannot alone solve the problem. The much more challenging question of human nature and its possibilities is left unanswered in terms of a political project that would be available for operation; on this, the narrator has "nothing to say, only to show." Besides, Rushdie has earlier conceded the role of a sage, a gesture Benjamin, suspicious as he was of any revelation beyond the divine, would have approved enthusiastically:

> Human beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded

> creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions. Partial beings in all the senses of that phrase. . . . Writers are no longer sages, dispensing the wisdom of the ages. (*Imaginary Homelands* 12)[16]

It is the author's reference to Baudelaire and the extremely influential *Fleurs du Mal* that suggests a vintage for this self-perception. As Benjamin notes, "To Baudelaire, the lyric poet with a halo is antiquated" (194). In a later prose piece entitled "A Lost Halo," Baudelaire writes:

> A short while ago I was hurrying across the boulevard, and amidst this moving chaos in which death comes galloping at you from all sides at once I must have made an awkward movement, for the halo slipped off my head and fell onto the muddy asphalt pavement. . . . so here I am, just like you! (quoted in Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire* 195)

In "Notes on Writing," Rushdie warns us:

> Beware the writer who sets himself or herself up as the voice of a nation. This includes nations of race, gender, sexual orientation, elective affinity. This is the New Behalfism. Beware behalfies! The

> New Behalfism demands uplift, accentuates the positive, offers stirring moral instruction. It abhors the tragic sense of life. Seeing literature as inescapably political, it replaces literary values by political ones. (23)

The artist trapped in a totalizing system seems no longer able to perform the god-like task of making the fragmentary whole. The writer who catalogs the fragmentary experiences of urban mass culture cannot do so without losing something of the aura of bygone times. Benjamin observes that Baudelaire "indicated the price for which the sensation of the modern age may be had: the disintegration of the aura in the experience of shock" (196). In thus relinquishing the halo and the illusion of wholeness, however, the writer may better draw attention to the disastrous and tragic conditions of the modern world. Although a pat homology between the two writers is neither tenable nor necessary, the analogy of their situations as writers confronted with a dizzying era of change (each in his own context) is not without merit for this discussion.

In wielding the matter of local place and culture with a lightness of touch, the story of the nation begins to tell the story of the world at a critical moment, a shared fate in which we are caught together. Faced with the complex machinery of the times, the writer offers a mode of perception, not the secret intelligence that will save the world, but a noumenal truth gleaned from the phenomenal. It may even seem that to ask of the postcolonial author that he or she necessarily rescue the world from history is to place on the postcolonial text, and perhaps inevitably to displace, the full weight of subaltern articulation and emancipation.

If history cannot be subjected totally to the imagination, nor can the imagination be rendered totally subservient to history. To propose that art is ideological and political is neither to claim for it an equation with political action (or its lack) nor is it to suggest its irrelevance for the political project. It is possible to posit, as

Auden all too archly phrases it, that "poetry makes nothing happen," but poetry, and literature by extension, perform a distinct sort of action that has its significance in the world of symbolic values and in structures of perception, for after all, "It survives in the valley of its saying." It has, as Auden concludes in the second stanza of "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," "a way of happening." If art permits humans to create worlds that can survive in their own ways of saying and transmission, it is nevertheless a world very different from the primary world of everyday things; to disregard the constitutive laws of each of these worlds as fundamentally different is to diminish the import of both. As Adorno insists, "Although the demarcation line between art and the empirical must not be effaced, and least of all by the glorification of the artist, artworks nevertheless have a life sui generis" (*Aesthetic Theory* 4).

If the world of economic strife and religious conflict is somehow transformed through aesthetic distance, this process nevertheless gestures at what might be, sometimes through the recollection of what might have been. In gesturing at the fundamental principle of social change, the extension of the capacity to love "to a whole form of social life," as Eagleton defines "radical politics," the artefact maker brings to life what has yet to exist, what the world of work does not and cannot admit (*Ideology of the Aesthetic* 413). It is not within the story's capacity to concretize utopia (Adorno claims that "art is no more able than theory to concretize utopia, not even negatively") but its insertion of that something new which has not yet occurred can conjure a vision of what to long for: "A cryptogram of the new is the image of collapse; only by virtue of the absolute negativity of collapse does art enunciate the unspeakable: utopia" (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 32). Each of Rushdie's fictional texts to date, including *Grimus* but perhaps excluding *Haroun and the Sea of Stories,* has concluded in the image of collapse, opening up the prospect of the unknown. Any engagement with the other that does not contend with the possibility of the unknown and of the unknown possibilities of liberation can only reduce the alterity of otherness to self-sameness.

The analogy of the pen with the sword may be less suitable in understanding the functionality of this sort of text than that with the telling of beads on a rosary. As an act of supplication, as a

counter to the disremembering that characterizes our double-paced, information-filled lives, as the maker of a world that has never existed but could be and could have been, the text performs an offering in the belief that something is to be gained from the telling of stories, that the ritual is neither predictably meaningless, as it seems to cynics, nor transparently transformatory, as it does to naive idealists. In the end, as the narrator reminds us, "stories are what's left of us, we are no more than the few tales that persist" (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 110). When the phenomenal has passed on, it is the noumenal that offers the comfort of continuity. Unknown comfort to unknown recipients of this grace, the modes of intelligence offered constitute its only reliable authority, one we ignore at our own peril. "Politics and literature," to quote from the author himself, "like sport and politics, do mix, are inextricably mixed, and . . . *that mixture has consequences*" (*Imaginary Homelands* 100; emphasis mine). Unlike historical events now infamous by the name of "the Rushdie affair," the quality and timbre of these consequences in the perceptual world are not always ponderable at a given time; nor can we indulge the fantasy of direct impact without suspicion.

If skepticism about the role of this sort of elite literature in the real world must be answered by belief in its unique capacity to tell another tale than that told in history and politics, unquestioning faith in its abilities must also be tempered by a realistic apprehension of its stipulations. If the artwork challenges the status quo, it is also determined and limited by it; if it offers glimpses of a redemptive vision, it is nevertheless no substitute for a world redeemed in actuality. Having inserted itself into the gaps and limits of history, fiction arrives at its limits. An important story has been told. It is another machine that now waits at its vulnerable shores.

Chapter 6

Geography Is Not History: The Storyteller in the Age of Globalization

> Modern man no longer works at what cannot be abbreviated.
>
> —Paul Valéry, in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*

> It is all too easy to relegate love and hate, joy and sorrow, hope and despair to the domain of psychology, thereby removing them from the concerns of radical praxis. Indeed, in terms of political economy they may not be "forces of production," but for every human being they are decisive, they constitute reality.
>
> —Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*

In "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin claims that the catastrophe of history has robbed us of the "art of storytelling" and "the ability to exchange experiences" (*Illuminations* 83). Gone with this art is the capacity for collective memory building and the transmission of wisdom. At the heart of Benjamin's lament is the transformation in the structure of experience itself.[1] As Richard Wolin points out

in his reading of "The Storyteller," Benjamin's assessment of the structure of experience in modern life is one "where events take on a desultory and isolated, overwhelmingly *private* character; where 'experiences' are at best meaningful for the individual, but have forfeited the attribute of *universality* from which the element of wisdom, the moral of the story, traditionally derived" (*Walter Benjamin* 219–20). The novel form, Benjamin contends, stems from the profound isolation of the novelist having no roots in or access to oral tradition, affording little more than the false and subjective coherence of the individual recollection that must substitute for the counsel and wisdom of the storyteller. In its sundering from the life and tradition of the community, the novel offers meaning by expending itself in the teleological structure of the "ending" that is "more proper to it . . . than to any story" and that "invites the reader to a divinatory realization of the meaning of life by writing 'Finis'" (100). In the newest stage of capitalism, moreover, the novel form confronts a fresh crisis from new technologies of representation and broadcasting: "This new form of communication is information" (88). If it was "half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one produces it," now it is impossible to relay narrative in its amplitude because "no event any longer comes to us without being already shot through with explanation" (89).

The subjugation of story to information has profound implications for postcolonial literature. In the age of globalization and commodifi-cation, the postcolonial novel is particularly susceptible to the new order that privileges information and emphasizes the subjective idea at the expense of the "multiplicity" that constitutes its truth-content (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 131).[2] The stress on timeliness and novelty, and the over-representation of postcolonial literature in the novel form, moreover, promote the illusion of isolationist particularity because the text is seen as tethered to a historical context in a relatively unambiguous, unmediated relationship. When perceived in a philosophical relation to it, however, art has the capacity to negotiate the particular by transcending the individual subject and pointing "back to the collective subject" in a philosophical universality (131). A "contemporary consciousness fixated on the tangible and unmediated" disregards this aspect of artistic refraction, consigning it to the sterile category of information (131). "The

value of information," Benjamin states, "does not survive the moment in which it was new" (*Illuminations* 90). A determination of the value of post-colonial literature must, therefore, necessarily undertake an investigation of its struggle (failed or otherwise) to reconcile the individual with a collectivity, and information with intelligence. The focal center of the debate over representation thus involves the postcolonial novel's stance toward social categories, its understanding of experience as both particular and withdrawn from the individual ego, and its placement of situational realities in a philosophical temporality where different rationalities may interact.

Arundhati Roy's incorporation of the Kathakali Man (*katha,* story; *kali,* performance) in *The God of Small Things* introduces into the framework of the novel the figure of a Benjaminian storyteller to revivify the relation of the novel form to the fecund tradition of Great Stories and that of mimesis to experience.[3] Indigenous to Kerala, Kathakali is a classical dance drama "based on subject matter from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and stories from Shaiva literature" ("Kathakali"). Endangered, like Benjamin's storyteller, the Kathakali Man whose body and soul are "harnessed wholly to the task of storytelling," the narrator laments, "These days has become unviable. Unfeasible. Condemned goods" (219). Derided by his children who "long to be everything that he is not," the Kathakali Man is left dangling somewhere "between heaven and earth" (219). Since he cannot do what his children aspire to, "He cannot slide down the aisles of buses, counting change and selling tickets. He cannot answer bells that summon him. He cannot stoop behind trays of tea and Marie biscuits," the Kathakali Man turns in despair to tourism: "He hawks the only things he owns. The stories that his body can tell. He becomes a Regional Flavor" (219). He cannot retool "his only instrument," the body that "has been planed and polished, pared down, harnessed wholly to the task of storytelling" (219). In his corporal integration of the product he produces, the Kathakali man is what he does: "he strives not to *enter* a part but to escape it. But this is what he cannot do. In his abject defeat lies his supreme triumph" (220). An increasingly powerful market system now seeks to bankrupt the artisan, alienate him from the story he has learned to become, and convert him and his art into labor, evaluating and transforming it through altered standards of value. Now catering to tourists'

"imported attention spans," the Kathakali man dances to the market, selling amputated stories. The storyteller, we are reminded, "does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report" (Benjamin 91). Abbreviation and premature crystallization are heresy to the storyteller. The Kathakali Man who hurries through the story to its cameo essence knows that humiliation and rage follow from the corruption of the tale thus reduced. Like the Meenachal river, once described as a "wild thing," but now shrunk and polluted by the stink of "shit and pesticides bought with world bank loans," like the town of Ayemenem now sprouting Gulf-money houses and alien television antennae, the Kathakali Man, too, must enter a global marketplace dominated by "practical" considerations. His "hopelessly practical" acceptance of this reconditioning of his art ensures a minimal sort of survival but not his sanity, which the Kathakali Man struggles to retain by dancing for the temple gods—a pure community of listeners—in atonement "for corrupting their stories. For encashing their identities" (218). In the evenings, at the five-star Heritage Hotel that caters to a growing tourist industry, tourists are "treated to truncated kathakali performances ('Small attention spans,' the hotel people explained to the dancers). So ancient stories were collapsed and amputated. Six-hour classics were slashed to twenty-minute cameos" (121). In documenting the profound impact of changing market forces through the figure of the Kathakali Man and the world of Ayemenem, *The God of Small Things* obliges us to reengage the encounter between the traditional and modern world. The tradition from which the Kathakali Man derives his stories, moreover, shares the same scaffolding upon which the "story" of *The God of Small Things* is also built, the sameness belied by the persistent shifting of the weight of significance onto the small things that carry the protest of the particular against the general and the universal. The novel's interest in documenting the "development" of a small town, its microscopic focus on the "scurry of small lives," and its fidelity to the remembrance of things past—"*small* things" past in the scope of geological time and history—exhort a renewed understanding of the struggle of the postcolonial storyteller against socioeconomic forces that threaten the integrity of experience. The novel's treatment of this theme, however, proceeds without an idealization of the storyteller or of tradition as such. The Kathakali

Men, we are told, "took off their makeup and went home to beat their wives. Even Kunti, the soft one with breasts," at the conclusion of the performance (224). It is the story that harnesses and gives shape to what is beautiful within the performer in the course of the performance. What is important, therefore, is the story and its repeated performance, the performance, indeed, of remembrance as the promise of a new future that neither tradition nor modernity, neither the past nor the present have been able to keep. As Aoi suggests in *The Moor's Last Sigh,* the counsel is to "spin it out . . . every day we stay alive, we improve our chances of rescue" (421).

Richard Wolin contends that by the time Benjamin wrote his 1939 essay, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," he had already revised some of the claims of the 1936 essay, "The Storyteller." In the later essay, featuring a discussion of Baudelaire as well as Proust, Benjamin describes the labors Proust undertook to resuscitate the figure of the storyteller. Benjamin's remarks on Baudelaire and Proust concede possibilities in modern art that he was unwilling to grant in "The Storyteller," even if they are nevertheless conjoined with the dismantling of the aura. In the later essay, as Wolin explains, "no longer does Benjamin abstractly seek to counter-pose an idyllic past to the decadent present. Instead, he attempts to work through the dilemmas of modern social life in a more immanent fashion" (227). In "Some Motifs," Benjamin targets for examination the crisis of experience in the modern age with specific attention to the "shocks" of modern life:

> The greater the share of the shock factor in particular impressions, the more constantly consciousness has to be alert as a screen against stimuli; the more efficiently it does so, the less do these impressions enter experience *(Erfahrung),* tending to remain in the sphere of a certain hour in one's life *(Erlbenis).* Perhaps the special achievement of shock

> defense may be seen in its function of assigning to an incident a precise point in time in consciousness at the cost of the integrity of its contents. (165)

The supplantation of experience as *Gedächtnis* (remembrance) by *Erinnerung,* its disintegration in consciousness, is a hallmark of the transformation that no longer permits direct experience.[4] Its filtration through consciousness distances the experience, robbing it of "the integrity of its contents." In Benjamin's view, Proust's deployment of *mémoire involuntaire* attempts to restore something of this integrity to "things past."[5] Benjamin's modification of the antinomial scheme of "The Storyteller" in his essays on Baudelaire and Proust permit a more flexible understanding of the significance of modernist art, despite his propensity for idealizing the past and prehistory.[6] However, Benjamin does not readily concede that the dismantling of the aura of distance (which the masses supposedly desired) could be countered by the creation of another sort of magical aura through the production of images and metaphors in the work of these authors.[7] Although Benjamin lauds their ability to document the impact of historical change on artistic form, he is unable to conceive of aura in a dialectical framework that can incorporate its ersatz opposite without being completely superseded by it. The persistence in art of auratic elements that cannot be covered by other formal systems is the "true source," as Raymond Williams explains, of "the specializing categories of 'the aesthetic'" (133). The sociality of these elements is undeniable, but it is not an attribute that can explain away their power. In Adorno's philosophically informed understanding of aesthetics, it is the status of artistic production *in a dialectic with its sociality* that must command our attention. Although the larger body of Benjamin's work is likely to give us pause in dispatching too prematurely the debate on aura to conclusion, in "The Work of Art," Benjamin's formulations, moreover, generally proceed within a European understanding of the phenomena of tradition and modernity that does not always obtain for cultural productions issuing from other parts of the world *(Illuminations)*. The global current ushering in the new phase of modernity worldwide

proceeds at a variant rate in different contexts, sweeping local cultures even as it is resisted by them. In its interaction with multiple relations of production, the aesthetic among them, the postcolonial literary text produces an account of these relations, not so much or not only as a belated explanation of a phenomenon already past in the "developed" world, but as a multiply articulated structure that constitutes a formal challenge to its basic tenets and definitional boundaries.

In his reading of "The Storyteller," Timothy Brennan has suggested that there are "three major areas in where Benjamin's account seems contradicted by many novels of the contemporary Third World": "As a negation of epic, he supposed the novel to stand against 'memory'—the 'epic faculty par excellence,' whereas 'memory'. . . is what many of these novels insist on preserving (*Salman Rushdie* 17). Brennan also suggests that moralizing is by no means at an end in the Third World novel. "Finally," he suggests, "because information must always sound plausible, the novel was thought to oppose the inclination of the storyteller to borrow from the miraculous, which the wholesale success of so-called 'magical realism'. . . has shown to be wrong" (17). Benjamin's overwhelmingly dichotomous opposition between traditional and modern societies in "The Storyteller," moreover, does not adequately accommodate the complexities of either, while his idealization of the past has incurred much criticism.[8] In form and content, many postcolonial novels continue to engage the challenge of storytelling in the ongoing tussle between tradition and modernity. In the scheme of many postcolonial novels, such as Rushdie's subcontinental works or Roy's *The God of Small Things,* not only is there no sharp discernible break between these phases, but they are also complicated by internal inconsistencies. Besides, memory and the integrity of experience continue to be significant motifs in a great deal of postcolonial literature. The figure of the Benjaminian storyteller thus stands at the hinge of a new phase of the dialectic of modernism within the plotting of postcolonial spatiotemporality.

In its attempt to chronicle the ongoing struggle between global and local, traditional and modern, general and literary modes of production, *The God of Small Things* invites us to confront the formal challenges that are posed by this encounter for the novelist and the storyteller. "For practical purposes in a hopeless practical

world" (Roy 34), the narrator admits, storytelling must succumb to abbreviation, because the labor of a "slow piling one on top of the other of thin, transparent layers" is no longer valued by its impatient and inattentive audience (Benjamin 93). In acknowledging this aspect of the spirit of the information age, the novel seems to accept the conditions of its production and their impact on its formal lineament. In the double gesture of seeming to concede the end of storytelling in its richness, and in straining against the impulse to abbreviation and cameo essence, however, the novel reveals the conditions of its productive origins without capitulating to them completely. If it thus surrenders some of its aura and authority, it also recalls that very aura and authority. The via media between auratic and nonauratic is skillfully traversed, recalling what was for Adorno the value of deaestheticization *(Entkunstung)* in the face of binary alternatives. The novel's structural principle recalls precisely those "Great Stories" that Kathakali tells, even as it confronts the narrative order demanded by "a purely practical sense" (Roy 32, 34). Benjamin claims that

> what differentiates the novel from all other forms of prose literature— the fairy tale, the legend, even the novella—is that it neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it. This distinguishes it from storytelling in particular. (*Illuminations* 87)

But Roy's novel operates on a modal scheme that shows a deep kinship with the spirit of the storyteller so immersed in the tale that the "stories are his children *and* his childhood" even as it acknowledges the unfeasibility of the Kathakali Man (219; emphasis mine). In resorting to the prelinguistic communicative mode of *abhinaya* (from the Sanskrit *abhi,* toward plus *ni. naya,* to carry), however, the Kathakali man alerts us to the nonliteral transmission of meaning, one anterior to oral or other "linguistic"

modes of communication. Often crudely translated as “acting,” “miming,” or “facial expression,” the complex codes of *abhinaya* imply the act of carrying the spectator toward the meaning through the immersion of the body itself in the communicative performance. The complete identification of the dancer with character and of the story-teller with the story seeks to collapse the boundaries between tale and teller, form and content. Roy’s paean to the Kathakali Man thus identifies a philosophical subscription that the novel as a whole attempts to approximate in its formal intelligence. The spirit of the communicative act is captured in the description of the Kathakali Man to the stories he tells:

> To the Kathakali Man these stories are his children and his childhood. He has grown up with them. They are the house he was raised in, the meadows he played in. They are his windows and his way of seeing. So when he tells his story, he handles it as he would a child of his own. He teases it. He punishes it. He sends it up like a bubble. He wrestles it to the ground and lets it go again. He laughs at it because he loves it. He can fly you across whole worlds in minutes, he can stop for hours to examine a wilting leaf. (219)

Through its structural integrity, the text tries to assimilate key elements of the great stories that modern life confines to tradition and threatens to consign to oblivion. In its slow circling around the events, the periodic return to its nodal moments, and its spinning away from the magnetic force of the events, the novel draws attention to its formal imperatives, through the labor of

carrying meaning in the whole "body" of the text as a plangent and complex theater of communication. It is not only the content of the novel that reflects the experience of modern life, but its architectonic design that attempts to integrate experience into the creative process, which also echoes the weaving and unraveling of the work of unconscious memory. The use of the third person and the lack of a strictly progressive narrative divest it of the effect of *Bildung,* even if what is built, repatched, and rebuilt produces the effect of a house one might inhabit. The narrative continues its work ceaseless secreting recollected experience—a "slow piling one on top of the other of thin, transparent layers" from which the pearl emerges, its original essence amalgamated into its making (93). The great stories, the narrator confides "don't deceive you with thrills and trick endings. They don't surprise you with the unforeseen" (218). In subscribing to this ethic, the novel eschews the thrill of novelty, the surprise of the unforeseen, even as it recounts and confronts exhilarating and horrific experiences. The formal design of the novel seeks to corrode the shock of the plot through a process of slowly familiarizing the reader with the events and their resonance as they reside in the register of regressive recollection. The known plot provides a basic frame upon which the text is woven, and fashioned, reworked, and refashioned. The story thus proceeds through a deliberate weaving rather than a reproduction of events as they happened in empirical experience. The novel's formal organization and structural ethic of recollection as forecasting raise inevitable comparisons with the work of the storyteller at a time when such modes of exchanging experiences are facing extinction, by Benjamin's account.

In *The God of Small Things,* the narrator's haphazard return to small things past conveys an insistence on the integrity of the mundane, rendered significant through the power of remembrance. Refusing insulation from the force of the unconscious, the narrative instinctively and repeatedly returns to that which is hidden in the past. The rising of involuntary memories in the novel, time after time, in the arrested image of the watch that always registers the hour and the minute as "ten to two"—the time painted on its surface—unyokes the experience from the lived hour and casts it into the always of remembrance. Such is the force of remembrance that the events and sensations once experienced are presented through a structural inversion as if

they are yet to be. There is no simple past to recover, but a future that must be foretold from the vantage of the past moment. It is, moreover, through a return to the unbuffered state of consciousness of childhood that the contact with experience is reestablished. In its refusal to close the book on the incident, preventing the closure that would assign it a place and time, the novel resorts not to the reproduction of the lived instant and its "meaning" but to the production of a textual weave that incorporates its incommensurable history, admittedly producing not its image but its "afterimage," but through the mode of return via involuntary rather than organized, intellectualized memory. "The important thing for the remembering author,"Benjamin submits in his essay entitled "The Image of Proust," "is not what he experienced, but the weaving of his memory, the Penelope work of recollection" (*Illuminations* 204). Or, as Benjamin goes on to amend, "should one call it, rather, a Penelope work of forgetting?"

The narrator of *The God of Small Things* likens the work of memory to a woman seen on an upstate New York train:

> Across the aisle from Rahel a woman with chapped cheeks and a mustache coughed up phlegm and wrapped it in twists of newspaper that she tore off the pile of Sunday papers on her lap. She arranged the little packages in neat rows on the empty seat in front of her as though she was setting up a phlegm stall.
>
> "Memory," the narrator proposes, "was that woman on the train":
>
> Insane in the way she sifted through dark things in a closet and emerged with the most unlikely ones—a fleeting look, a feeling. The smell of smoke. A windscreen

> wiper. A mother's marble eyes. Quite sane in the way she left huge tracts of darkness veiled. Unremembered. (69–70)

The lunatic activities of the woman convey something of the random order of memory, its careful arrangement of a chance assortment of memory bits, and its imbuing of information and news with the mucus of bodily effluence as the body coughs up what was once felt. The arbitrariness of recollection, of the partial access to the past is captured in the light and shade of memory. When Rahel thinks of home, it is "always in the colors of the dark, oiled wood of boats, and the empty cores of the tongues of flame that flickered in brass lamps" (70). This image offers a telling comparison with Proust's narrative ethic that is founded on the belief that the trueness of the whole picture lies in "those unerring proportions of light and shade, emphasis and omission, memory and forgetfulness to which conscious recollection and conscious observation will never know how to attain" (Proust 475).

As I demonstrate in the concluding section of this essay, however, the device of "*mémoire involuntaire*" cannot be unproblematically grafted onto the structural weave of *The God of Small Things.* Roy's particular deployment of the codes of memory and remembrance, through a third-person narrative, introduces several complications into the formulaic application of this concept from Proust's *The Remembrance of Things Past.* Nor, indeed, are the dancer and the dance, the teller and tale, the experience and the narrative joined in the sublime unities suggested by the Kathakali Man's performance. The reformulation of "recollection" within the third-person mode performs a significantly different task from that undertaken by the first-person narrator of Proust's great novel of remembrance. The conclusion to this chapter elucidates the import of this difference.

In its own work of weaving, *The God of Small Things* tells many stories great and small. Aijaz Ahmad isolates two plot lines in the story: "one that narrates the growing up of Rahel and the stunting of Estha, and the other which brings their mother [Ammu] so fatally close to [her untouchable lover] Velutha" ("Reading" 105). The catastrophic consequences of the latter for the lovers and the

children constitute some of the primary tragic content of the story. The death of the children's cousin, Uncle Chacko's daughter Sophie Mol, and the discovery of Ammu's illicit affair with Velutha result in Velutha's death at the hands of the police, Ammu's expulsion from the ancestral house in which she has no legal share as a woman, the returning of her son Estha to her divorced husband, and the marking of this tragedy on the lives of both the children. Playing an instrumental role in these tragedies is the children's grandaunt, Baby Kochamma, herself embittered by frustrated love and frightened by the potential loss of her own class and caste benefits by the specter of Marxist revolution and the rising tide of a violent Naxalite insurgence. Rahel's return to the scene of these tragedies twenty-three years later to reunite with her brother who has been Re-Returned by his father and has long ago stopped talking, "stopped talking altogether, that is," begins the journey back through the past (12). The novel's mode of telling, however, is better described as a retelling in its resolute effort to incorporate event and calamity into the register of memory, transforming them into a poetic experience that does not expire as the incident would in lived experience. The story is thus not told so much as it is retold, not even remembered so much as subjected to the more difficult manner of unforgetting. The narrator attempts to transmit the events in the story to divest them of the shock of instantaneous experience and pass them on to the register of enactment and production as a house one might inhabit or the smell one knows from a lover's skin, but the experience returns, involuntarily, in the codes of remembrance, "like a fruit in season. Every season" (253). Basted with slogans and sparse statements that return in the rituals of memory and take away the raw shock of the horrific events through repetition and through the preparation of the consciousness against the shock of stimulus, the story as narrative is nevertheless inadequate to the experience. Acquiring a poetic and aphoristic resonance that function with the economy of a lyric, cryptic fragments, "old roses on a breeze," "Locusts Stand I" "viable die-able age," "Ten to Two," "no ripples in water" inscribe grief with the incomplete text of truncated language while lessons and morals are woven into the texture of the tale in a tight weave: "Everything can change in a day,""It's best to be prepared," "Anything can happen to anyone," "If he fought he couldn't win." The foundational script for the tragedy to

come is condensed into the fundamental "Love Laws" and the phrases, "the laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much." As it lives in the multipronged modes of remembrance and involuntary memory, experience is simultaneously distanced by traumatized consciousness and constantly reabsorbed. "An experienced event," Benjamin explains, "is finite—at any rate, confined to one sphere of experience; a remembered event is infinite, because it is only a key to everything that happened before it and after it" (204). The release of event from the sphere of lived experience into the aesthetic mode of recollection imbues it with a significance denied to its mundane character in real life.

In his assessment of Proust's methods, Benjamin recalls the purpose of the story, "which is one of the oldest forms of communication": "It is not the object of the story to convey a happening *per se,* which is the purpose of information; rather, it embeds it in the life of the storyteller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening. It thus bears the marks of the storyteller much as the earthen vessel bears the marks of the potter's hand" (*Illuminations* 161). The restoration of the figure of the storyteller in the age of information is a task of some difficulty, the measure of which is evident, as Benjamin points out, in Proust's eight-volume work that struggles in its remembrance of things past to combine "certain contents of the individual past" with "material of the collective past" (161). "Things which could be told in very few words" become the most difficult of experiences as they join in an alternative relation with life and history in the alembic of reflection and imagination (209). Whether or not Roy's "third world novel" can offer us the "satisfactions of Proust," the formal structure of the novel and its relationship to the events to storytelling in the Benjaminian sense constitute a potent challenge to the reported exhaustion of novel even as they frustrate the attempt to consign the novel to information and regional flavor. In refusing to submit to the shock of the new, the novel recasts the singular event into the timeless framework of ever-presence; in refusing to surrender singularity, it takes individual "love, hope, and infinnate [sic] joy" to be the foundation of liberation.[9] In this dual maneuver, the novel proposes a powerful alternative apprehension of the global as a mobile and durable trope morphed over time and space in terms

that refuse to renounce the singular. In an age that subjugates story to information, tradition to novelty, and geography to globalism, the textual and narrative strategies used in *The God of Small Things* short-circuit these simple reductions, reconjugating the relation between the particular and the universal.

The temporal framework of the novel provides the first of the contexts in which it pursues this reconjugation. "May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding month" (3). Thus begins the Booker-prize winning novel. Although the author has stated in an interview that she begins thus in order to acquaint the reader with the setting of the story, the use of the habitual present tense in the phrases that follow suggests another sort of continuance as much as contextual commencement. Actional phrases such as "red bananas ripen" and "jackfruits burst" in the opening paragraph imply a temporal scheme that is at once static and dynamic. The narrative delay in introducing character—Rahel does not appear in this scene till the fourth paragraph—combined with the grammatical structure of representation together create the impression that this scene will survive the characters and the story. A silent "always" lurks in the connective verb between subject and a usually sensuous predicate. May is thus always a hot, brooding month and so forth at a certain time of the year in this "neverchanging everchanging" world, in Joyce's phrase. The details are presented as familiar repetition rather than new information, and the scene is available not as timeless but as a point for endless return. Notwithstanding the literary tradition of reading nature descriptions as lyrical index of the character's state of mind, particularly given personificatory epithets such as "brooding" and "sullen," the represented world of these early passages functions as a map of individual emotion even as it provides a frame into which we and the character, as much as the story, can enter and exit. The concatenation of "events"—bananas ripening, jackfruit bursting, bluebottles dying—belongs to more than one specific season, the mood of "sloth and sullen expectation" to more than one story to come or one already past. Although specific references to "electric poles" and "highways" in subsequent paragraphs locate the ensuing narrative historically, the mood of the opening paragraph fixes the scene as always there in its tenor, if dynamic in its passing through time.[10]

Structured by time in its variant cognitive modal units—

memory, regression, remembrance, forecasting, and forgetting—the novel is formally and substantively occupied with the emotional and empirical import of time. The last word in the novel is given to "tomorrow," which is dually construed as a promissory pledge between lovers and a threat by a sociohistorical order that awaits its dues. Hope and catastrophe both belong to tomorrow. Or, as the events of the novel have already relayed to us, they have both already been experienced in the past from which every novel must draw its narrative. Drawing the story into another cycle of regression with this deceptive device, however, the novel's ending disrupts the expectation of progression from the plot and spirals the reader back into its recurrent vortex. The conscious cyclicality suggested by this novelistic move and the opening of the story with a description reliant on the scheme of ever-presence mediated by habitual return are part of a dialectical narrative and aesthetic structure. Inherent to it is that contradictory negotiation between the universal and particular that is the preserve of critical aesthetics. It is also, as critics such as Terry Eagleton have suggested, the foundational engine of an ethical negotiation with the other, which neither subsumes it in identity nor allows it to remain unaddressed in total nonidentity. In this sense, the new story emergent in the novel is ultimately a known story because it is saturated with the content of history and because in it emerge the repressed objects of time, memory, and consciousness. A novel "about a prosperous Indian family's ruin," as Alice Truax's review in the *New York Times* describes it, *The God of Small Things* is also a deeply familiar story not so much because it instantiates a universal principle, but because it is presented as a story that happens, and has already happened within the narrative scheme, because it restores to the mundane the significance of remembrance, and because it communicates the power of involuntary memory through affective communication in a third-person mode that is nevertheless both personal and removed (5). In the galleries of emotional remembrance and the formal construction of return in the novel, it is always happening, suggesting continuity as the foundational element of a shared experience.[11] Whether or not the novel works in a self-enclosed world "cut off from repetition," the story itself is presented as if repeated (A. Benjamin 126). Whether this is repetition in the Nietzschean sense of repetition with difference or repetition of the

same is the issue. If the "new" story codes itself as supplement by refusing to seal itself off from the collective experience *(Kollectiverfahrung)* of a larger humanity construed over space and geological time, by rejecting "uniqueness" while insisting upon particularity, it allows the framing of experience upon the chassis of continuity. In disregarding the narrative code that would emplot and terminate the story "by writing 'Finis,'" the novel wrests the story out of its empirical chronological context and reconfigures it aesthetically in a stubborn refusal of social semantics and philosophically in a resistance to the forgetting and alienation threatened by the present. It is the particular experience that returns, evernewnevernew, to challenge the isolation of novelty without relinquishing its difference.

Like the novel's formal ending, which is no descending curtain to the story, its narrative beginning is conceded only as a concession to the genealogical imperative of "a purely practical sense" (32). In this sense "it would probably be correct to say that it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem" (32). But that would be telling only one story, a modus operandi rejected in John Berger's epigraph to the book: "Never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one." "To say that it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem," the narrator objects, "is only one way of looking at it" (32). A prior beginning is then posited that wrenches the narrative first out of its temporal and then out of its posited spatial frame:

> Equally, it could be argued that it actually began thousands of years ago. Long before the Marxists came. Before the British took Malabar, before the Dutch ascendancy, before Vasca da Gama arrived, before the Zamorin's conquest of Calicut. Before three purple-robed Syrian bishops murdered by the Portuguese were found floating in the sea, with coiled sea

> serpents riding on their chests and oysters knotted in their tangled beards. It could be argued that it began long before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a teabag.

In the backward passage through historical time, moments of beginning are sought and then superseded by prior beginnings, fast-backwarding to a point close to the beginning of Christian historical time (St. Thomas is said to have arrived in Kerala in 52 a.d.). But even this point of origin does not suggest when it "really" began. Equally, then, "it could be argued"

> that it really began in the days when the Love Laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved, and how.
>
> And how much. (33)

In telescoping the beginning back to a period several centuries prior, and then to the days before numbered time, the narrator moves us into the archive of natural history and its precession. The beginning is, in fact, rendered insignificant by this elaborate excursion through beginnings. This sentiment recurs in a later meditation on "Great Stories":

> It didn't matter that the story had begun, because kathakali discovered long ago that the secret of the Great Stories is that they *have* no secrets. The Great Stories are the ones you have heard and want to hear again. The ones you can enter anywhere

> and inhabit comfortably. (218)

Secular evolutionary time and the salvational time of Judeo-Christianity are spliced together with the mythical timeless to locate the beginning of the story in an unknown moment when the love laws were made. The fundamentals of the story are available to us even before we embark upon this particular rendition of it. "Who lives, who dies, who finds love, who doesn't" are thus already known, the narrator insists, "but one listens as if one doesn't" (218). This compulsion to listen to what is known and to know it again is the revolt of the aesthetic particular against the habit of forgetting.

Even before this unknown moment of the origin of the Rahel and Estha's story, however, there is a story in progress that is beyond our usual historical perspective. In his Thesis XVIII on the philosophy of history, Benjamin observes that:

> "In relation to the history of organic life on earth," writes a modern biologist, "the paltry fifty millennia of *homo sapiens* constitute something like two seconds at the close of a twenty-four hour day. On this scale, the history of civilized mankind would fill one-fifth of the last second of the last hour." The present, which, as a model of Messianic time, comprises the entire history of mankind in an enormous abridgment, coincides exactly with the stature which the history of mankind has in the universe. (*Illuminations* 265)

In *The God of Small Things,* there is an analogous story of the earth

that Uncle Chacko tells his wide-eyed niece and nephew to give them "a sense of Historical Perspective (though Perspective was something which, in the weeks to follow Chacko himself would sorely lack)":

> He made them imagine that the earth—four thousand six hundred million years old—was a forty-six year old woman. . . . It had taken the whole of the Earth Woman's life for the earth to become what it was. For the oceans to part. For the mountains to rise. The Earth Woman was eleven years old, Chacko said, when the first single-celled organisms appeared. The first animals, creatures like worms and jellyfish, appeared only when she was forty. She was only forty-five—just eight months ago—when dinosaurs roamed the earth. (52)

The setting of history, human existence, individual joy and sorrow within this perspective compresses "the whole of contemporary history, the World of Wars, the War of Dreams, the Man on the Moon, science, literature, philosophy, the pursuit of knowledge" into "no more than a blink in the Earth Woman's eye" (53). It is, as Chacko says, "an awe-inspiring and humbling thought" that exposes the vanity both of individual lives and the histories made by man. Against this perspective on the globe, however, stand the small things and individual experiences that will not fade in the persistence of memory. The children may have learned about geological global time, but the smell of history that will "lurk forever in ordinary things" dwarfs the import of this expansionist perspective.

> They would grow up grappling with ways of living with what happened. They would try to tell themselves that in terms of geological time it was an insignificant event. Just a blink of the Earth Woman's eye. That Worse Things had happened. That Worse Things kept happening. But they would find no comfort in the thought. (54)

A global scale, geological or geographical, offers no solace for lifetimes of earthly suffering, for the "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage" (Benjamin 257).

Two parallel moves being made in the above passages constitute the material for my discussion of the novel's reinflection of the global in terms both historical and philosophical. I will broach first that aspect of historical globalism that has been understood as intercultural connectivity, before moving on to globalism understood through the framework of universalism. The history of Kerala that is condensed into the catalog of beginnings introduces the concept of a prior globalism that seldom features in the presentist views of historical globalization. We are told today that the transnational condition is readily educed from the mounting statistics of global migrations, the lightening dawn of the digital diaspora, our growing technological connectivity, and the increasingly rapid flow of culture, capital, and labor enabled by new technologies. These contemporary "global" phenomena are cited as the signs of globalization. The champions of financial globalization announce a new economic world order (the Greek *kosmos,* incidentally, means both "world" and "order" or "adornment") with a postbellum triumphalism—Robert Reich declares that "the major American company knows 'no national boundaries, feels no geographic constraints'" (quoted in Jilberto 2). Indeed, if we are to trust the insights of the advertising team for British Telecom, geography is history (O'Brien 1). A new cosmopolitanism is in the making, and the world is being

conceived of as global as "never before." Its boundaries are appearing ever-more transparent to our gaze, as they must have done to empire builders of a century before, to natural historians of a century before that, and to the circumnavigators of the two centuries before. Inherent and undeniable to the current one worldism is something that surely reminds us of the sense of epistemological conquest that characterized earlier versions of the phenomenon. Expressive of one more stage in what Max Weber referred to as the process of the "disenchantment of the world," the rhetoric of globalization nevertheless capitalizes on the idea of its unprecedented novelty. If the market is "the First Cause of contemporary thinking," novelty is the index of value in the capitalist marketplace (Malcolmson 239).

Is globalization a new phenomenon? Every age considers itself at the brink of calamitous change, near extinction, glorious revelation, complete regeneration. The AIDS disaster of today was the smallpox of yesterday and the plague of the day before. The end of the world is always imminent, the new science of today obsolete by tomorrow; Ptolemy gives way to Copernicus, Newtonian physics to quantum. If novelty were not the dominant index of value, the current "new" wave of globalism might be profitably contrasted with the "new" internationalism of the period following the almost forgotten First World War, as compared to the "system of internationalism" that prevailed a hundred years before this war and was postulated on a principle that sounds suspiciously similar to that guiding today's World Trade Organization, that "efficiency in production and distribution demanded that everybody buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest" (Foreman ix). Even the simplest of surveys back across history reveals several "global" moments when imperial/managerial, technological, scientific, religious, or philosophical globe girding, or some combination thereof, was in full motion. If the global is a matter of interconnectivity, surely ours is not the first such moment in global history. Daniel Headrick offers the following examples of globalization, nineteenth-century style:

> Physicians in Africa published their findings in France and Britain. American

> gun manufacturers exhibited their wares in London, British experts traveled to America to study gunmaking, and General Wolseley paid a visit to the American inventor Hiram Maxim to offer suggestions. Macgregor Laird was inspired by news of events on the Niger to try out a new kind of ship. Dutch and British botanists journeyed to South America to obtain plants to be grown in Asia. Scientists in Indonesia published a journal in French and German for an international readership. The latest rifles were copied in every country and sent to the colonies for testing. (208)

A century prior, Carl Linnaeus was making the following observations in a communiqué to a colleague in the field of natural history:

> My pupil Spaarman has just sailed for the Cape of Good Hope, and another of my pupils, Thunbeg, is to accompany a Dutch embassy to Japan. . . . The younger Gmelin is still in Persia, and my friend Falck is in Tartary. Mutis is making splendid botanical discoveries in Mexico. Koenig has found a lot of new things in Tranquebar. Professor Friis Rottboll of

> Copenhagen is publishing the plants found in Surinam by Rolander. The Arabian discoveries of Forsskal will soon be sent to press in Copenhagen. (quoted in Pratt 27)

To be sure, Linnaeus's reference is to a global classificatory project that would bring the diversity of nature itself into one ordering episteme, imposing organizational closure not only on the discovered but on the as yet unknown. Nevertheless, the project of making meaning on a global scale—the business of most First World epistemological enterprises— initiates a globalism *avant la lettre.*

No less significant is the idea of premodern modernity structured around slavery that is explored by Paul Gilroy in the *Black Atlantic,* or that ordered by the plantation industry in Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power,* or that recently posited by Gyan Prakash in "A Different Modernity" with regard to the protonational modernities of indigenous Indian communities. More revolutionary yet is Andre Gunder Frank's advocacy in *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* of a holistic global (i.e., non-Eurocentric) perspective that he uses to adumbrate the global order that existed in Afroeurasia between 1400 and 1800; an even earlier Indian Ocean internationalism is referred to by Kirti Chaudhuri as "Asia before Europe" in a book of the same name. If novelty were not the dominant index of value, and if *ersatz* global discourses did not sport so doggedly tenacious a First World centric orientation, contemporary post-colonial history might be seen not merely as a colonial concussion but as a part of a perpetual negotiation with change. The depressing reality of a system that produces "a phenomenology of the present so alluring in its immediacy as to seduce the consumer to forget the past and bracket the future" is that increasingly, whether or not geography is history, the danger is that it is history that is history (Radhakrishnan 225). The time is now long past when we might ask, with Edouard Glissant, "Is not every era 'modern' in relation to the preceding one?," and to add, with him, that "it seems that at least one of the components of 'our' relation to modernity is the spread of the awareness we have of it. The awareness of our

awareness (the double, the second degree) is our source of strength and our torment" (quoted in Gilroy 1).

In *The Age of Empire 1875–1914,* Eric Hobsbawm asks, "How did the world of the 1880s compare with that of the 1780s?" "In the first place," he responds, "it was now genuinely global. Almost all parts of it were now known and more or less adequately or approximately mapped" (13). More than a century later, how are we to respond to a similarly posed comparative question? Our hyperawareness tells us that this one is new and different, modern in a novel way because it is marked by a globality of unprecedented scale and scope, not to mention, dizzying speed—all of which impact the Great Stories and our attention spans. The somewhat long detour I have made through a selective survey of previous "global" historical moments is intended not to diminish the difference of the present in its singular manifestations but to introduce the dangers inherent in the ideology of "never-before" in the relation of the First World to its economic and developmental others. The isolation of the postcolonial literary text that is also implicit in a critical stance that privileges presentist empirical contexts is as much my subject as the discussion of the maneuvers of neocolonialism.

The discovery by the First World of the cultural and other productions of the rest of the world in the context of our foregoing discussion on novelty is rendered considerably more sinister in light of the current battles over intellectual property rights. In the current formation of globality with its quirky sense of proportion, the marginal is the sign of the global in the name of novelty, the First World is cognitively larger than the whole world, the hitherto unknown is reworked as new, and that which is not readily known —like nature—becomes the desired object of conquest.

It is in this ideological context with its manifestations in realpolitik that the aesthetic interventions of *The God of Small Things* must be located. If the novel introduces the expanded perspective of geological time as a corrective to micrological understanding and blinding presentism, it nevertheless insists on the centrality of small things and the integrity of small lives. If it insists that place and time and small things matter, that geography is not history, it also communicates their place within a much larger scopic order. Aesthetic remembrance, which is the motor of the novel, communicates another sense of the global universal in

what remains when the historical has passed on, when the experienced event is over, when the "Finis" of the plot is revealed as spurious end. The story is part of the Great Stories already in progress, the ones we are all familiar with. To be certain, the narrator's tale is not the same tale as that of the Great Stories, nor is it an example or type that fulfills the genre. In the dual sense of adherence and splitting, the story of Rahel and Estha and those they loved cleaves to and from the ideal form of the Great Stories the narrator extols. This relation of the universal and particular, one of nonidentity without disengagement, also informs the novel's stance toward the individual in relationship to conceptual categories. This relation is defined neither by radical particularity nor a preestablished universality of the particular, which would either subsume the object or relegate it to absolute indifference. Rather, it rests on a place for the sensate life of individual experience within the broad sweep of categories as the incommensurate and unknown that art yet seeks to imitate. It rests on the relation of the particular to other particulars in a constellation out of which we might grow a sense of the universal as that which is not already given. The content of this universal is that which is available in nature, not as an abstract theory of human nature or of natural beauty but by virtue of receptivity to that which is beautiful in nature. "What is beautiful in nature," then, is "what appears to be more than what is literally there. . . . art is not the imitation of nature but the imitation of natural beauty" (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 71). In the unknowableness of nature, its *Nichtidentischen* (nonidentity), "nature is beautiful in that it appears to say more than it is" (78). Clarifying its relation to nature, Adorno insists that "art is not nature, a belief that idealism hoped to inculcate, but art does want to keep nature's promise" (65). It is the image of what is not there in nature—yet—that inspires art by its negativity. The promise of "tomorrow" is all too tenaciously kept by history, the promise of redemption is all too regretfully broken. In casting experience in the mode of something close to Benjamin's notion of *Gedächtnis,* Adorno shared with Benjamin the hope "for a type of experience that would recapture the proper mimetic relationship between man and nature" and thus recall the promise of fulfillment that art reveals as a broken promise. In Adorno, remembrance is a notion that unites with the principle of nonidentity and the unrepresentability

of utopia:

> The object of art's longing, the reality of what is not, is metamorphosed in art as remembrance. In remembrance what is qua what was combines with the nonexisting because what was no longer is. Ever since Plato's doctrine of anamnesis the non-yet-existing has been dreamed of in remembrance, which alone concretizes utopia without betraying it into existence. Remembrance remains bound up in semblance: for even in the past the dream was not reality. (132)

Artistic transcendence consists precisely in the capacity of art to erode the unity of *Begriff* (concept) and object. In its ability to maintain the tension between the actuality of the object and its rendition in artistic projection, art resists the pressure of identity thinking that would subsume the particular into the universal general concept. As Adorno points out, "Certainly the mimetic element that is indispensable to art is, as regards its substance, universal, but it cannot be reached other than by way of the inextinguishably idiosyncratic particular subject" (41–42).[12] It is not surprising, then, that the novel keeps faith with the small things, understanding the ways in which the smallest of joys and sorrows can be invaded by "big things." In a global conspectus, from the "Historical Perspective," "Nothing mattered much. Nothing much mattered. And the less it mattered, the less it mattered. It was never important enough. Because Worse Things had happened . . . Worse Things kept happening" (20). As Ammu points out to her children, "Human beings were creatures of habit" and could become inured to anything, even suffering: "It was amazing the kind of things they could get used to. You only had to

look around you, Ammu said, to see that beatings with brass vases [which the children's grandmother Mammachi routinely suffers at the hands of her husband] were the least of them" (49). The second tragedy that follows the first is that the unrelenting accretion of human suffering and its cauterization of human sensibility permit us to forget the individual loss as the next catastrophe gathers force, "piling wreckage upon wreckage" (Benjamin, *Illuminations* 257). It is the inconsequential god of small things who fights but cannot win and who leaves no trace, no footprints, no ripples in the water that the novel knows must not be allowed to be forgotten in the broad sweep of human suffering. A liberation project that cannot attend to "small things" can never accomplish the "big" task that awaits it.

The novel's critique of a politics that is indifferent to the individual, that is heedless of the singular story, is encapsulated in the bitter comments that follow the brutal beating of Velutha on false charges of kidnapping and attempted rape. As the policemen enact "a clinical demonstration . . . of human nature's pursuit of ascendancy," Velutha is smashed and broken (292–93). Surveying their work, the agents of history step away from him, "Craftsmen assessing their work. Seeking aesthetic distance" (294).[13] "Their Work," the narrator reminds us, "lay folded on the floor, . . . abandoned by God and History, by Marx, by Man, by Woman and (in the hours to come) by Children [it is Estha who is blackmailed into betraying the memory of Velutha by identifying him to the police as an abductor]" (294).

In implicating god and history, Marx, man, woman, and children, the narrator leaves no one blameless. Velutha's Christianity, embraced by his family "to escape the scourge of Untouchability," is no defense against the persistent memory of the caste system: Converted untouchables are "known as the Rice-Christians. It didn't take them long to realize that they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire" (71). Because of its uniquely promising doctrine, it is the potentially protective system of communism, however, that incurs the most sustained critique because it is supposed to have sheltered those whom the weakness of human nature has routinely sacrificed to its lust for ascendancy. The exhaustion of the Marxist spirit is symbolized somewhat transparently in the description of the flag at the Communist Party local office: "The flag that fluttered on the roof had grown limp

and old. The red had bled away" (15). The failure of communism to rise above the destructive forces of the caste system is assaulted through the merciless portrayal of Comrade Pillai, owner of the Lucky Press who used to print labels for Uncle Chacko's now-defunct Paradise Pickles and Preserves factory. He is also, moreover, a Marxist politician who emerges "through chaos unscathed" and dismisses his role in the story's tragedy as "the Inevitable Consequence of Necessary Politics. The old omelette-and-eggs thing" (15). The "Necessary Politics" that sacrifices the individual to a greater cause is at the heart of Roy's indictment of communism.

It is Comrade Pillai who pulls down the last protective shield between Velutha and the impersonal forces of order and history when he intentionally misleads Inspector Thomas Mathew. Before he can act on Baby Kochamma's allegations of abduction and rape, Inspector Mathew of the Kottayam Police, "a prudent man, . . . took one precaution. He sent a jeep to fetch Comrade K. N. M. Pillai. . . . It was crucial for him to know whether the Paravan had any political support or whether he was operating alone. Though he himself was a Congress man, he did not intend to risk any run-ins with the Marxist government" (248). Comrade Pillai's selective information seals Velutha's fate:

> Comrade Pillai told Inspector Thomas Mathew that he was acquainted with Velutha, but omitted to mention that Velutha was a member of the Communist Party, or that Velutha had knocked on his door late the previous night, which made Comrade Pillai the last person to have seen Velutha before he disappeared. Nor, though he knew it to be untrue, did Comrade Pillai refute the allegation of attempted rape in Baby Kochamma's First Information Report. He merely assured

> Inspector Thomas Mathew that as far as he was concerned Velutha did not have the patronage of the protection of the Communist Party. (248)

Comrade Pillai's decision to surrender Velutha to the vengeful forces of history, to which the policemen are impersonal "henchmen," stems from his cunning appraisal of the danger to party unity posed by the untouchable. He has earlier attempted to persuade pickle-factory proprietor Chacko to "send him off" because "other workers are not happy with him. . . . 'You see, comrade,' he confides, 'from local standpoint, these caste issues are very deep-rooted'" (263). The narrator informs us that "Velutha's last visit to Comrade Pillai—after his confrontation with Mammachi and Baby Kochamma—and what had passed between them, remained a secret" (267). It is this final damning breach of faith that seals Velutha's fate, "the last betrayal that sent Velutha across the river, swimming against the current, in the dark and rain, well in time for his blind date with history" (267). In Comrade Pillai's manual for liberation, the individual case, which Velutha brings to him for appeal, is a hindrance to the progress of the revolution:[14]

> *It is not in the Party's interest to take up such matters.*
> *Individual's interest is subordinate to the organization's interest.*
> *Violating Party Discipline means violating Party Unity. . . . Progress of the Revolution.*
> *Annihilation of the Class Enemy.*
> *Comprador capitalist*
> *Spring-thunder.*

> And there it was again. Another religion turned against itself. Another edifice constructed by the human mind, decimated by human nature. (271–72)

If Comrade Pillai's professional omletteering is the stuff of tragedy, Chacko's flirtations with Marxism offer an indictment of a bourgeois socialism that "contains" the radical potential of communism. In Chacko's interactions with factory women, the tragedy of exploitation is rendered mundane by its unremarkable dailyness:

> Chacko was a self-proclaimed Marxist. He would call pretty women who worked in the factory to his room, and on the pretext of lecturing them on labor rights and trade union law, flirt with them outrageously. He would called them Comrade, and insist that they call him Comrade back (which made them giggle). (63)

In Ammu's estimation, this "case of a spoiled princeling playing *Comrade! Comrade!*" is no more than "hogwash": "An Oxford avatar of the old Zamindar mentality—a landlord forcing his attentions on women who depended on him for their livelihood" (63). Chacko's enthusiasm for the Marxist cause is, rightly enough, of little significance to Comrade Pillai who himself is not averse to humoring him on occasion without sacrificing his interest or classism: "Having bagged the contract for the Synthetic Cooking Vinegar labels, he deftly banished Chacko from the fighting ranks of the Overthrowers to the treacherous ranks of the To Be Overthrown" (265).[15] Roy's critique of a compromised Marxism is

even less veiled in an earlier assessment of the success of Marxism in Kerala:

> The real secret was that communism crept into Kerala insidiously. As a reformist movement that never overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste-ridden, extremely traditional community. The Marxists worked from *within* the communal divides, never challenging them, never appearing not to. (64)

Roy nevertheless concedes that "the high literacy level" that Kerala boasts of along with high life expectancy and the lowest infant mortality rate in India was "*because* of the Communist movement" (64). This concession aside, the indictment of Marxism is unmitigated by any further allowances for what is generally acknowledged as the relatively successful experience of communism in Kerala.

The novel has come in for some very harsh criticism precisely because of its negative portrayal of communism. Veteran Communist Party of India leader E. M. S. Namboodiripad describes it as "nothing more or less than anti-Communist propaganda" amounting on occasion to "libel and defamation" ("Now, It Is EMS's Turn"). In a very even-handed, even laudatory critique of the novel, Aijaz Ahmad takes serious issue with its anticommunism. Apart from some "overwriting," he claims, "the relatively more serious failing is in the way the book panders to the prevailing anti-Communist sentiment, which damages it both ideologically and formally" (Ahmad, "Reading" 103). Roy's "implacable hostility," he charges, has cost her as an artist.

> First, there is the breakdown of Realism itself, which is the main formal virtue of

> the book. . . . the virtue of good Realist literature is that it strives to portray the world realistically, so that the literary product *can* rise above the ideological prejudices of the author. In Arundhati Roy's case the opposite has happened. Her ideological prejudice masters and makes nonsense of the Realist's commitment to verisimilitude. (104)

Namboodiripad has also argued that the "unrealistic presentation" of the communist movement in Kerala conforms to the prevailing anticommunist sentiment in the transnational market ("Now, It Is EMS's Turn"). The charges of "unrealism," however, may have to contend with the widespread criticism of the Kerala model by the Dalit movement (Omvedt). The Kerala Dalit Sahitya Akademi has honored Roy for "her deep-seated sympathies for Dalits," while others agree that "upper-caste dominance has not been fundamentally changed by Kerala's history of social reform and Communist rule" (Omvedt).

Given the disproportionate burden of representation borne by elite postcolonial fiction, particularly through the medium of the Western press, Ahmad's fears are nevertheless unfortunately well founded. When Ahmad notes that Roy's "ideological opposition to Communism is not in itself surprising; it is very much a sign of the times, in the sense that hostility toward the Communist movement is now fairly common among radical sections of the cosmopolitan intelligentsia, in India and abroad," he also voices his lament for the worldwide decline of faith in Marxist ideals ("Reading" 103). The failures of Marxism in practice, which the novel exposes, have been used well before now to discredit the doctrine wholesale at a time when it remains one of few challenges against the unbridled march of capitalism and its growing acceptance. The potential role played by this powerful novel in reinforcing contempt for Marxist ideology can scarcely be discounted, bolstered as it is likely to be by the progressive smothering of opposition to global capitalism.

The novel's contribution to the neutralization of the force of Marxist ideas is a part of the interpretive grid used to explicate its "meaning." Its structural logic, however, is no less significant to a reconsideration of liberatory projects. The novel's sympathy for "small lives" forces it into a quarrel with the big ideology that cannot accommodate individual suffering or joy. Roy's subsequent antidevelopment essay, "The Greater Common Good," continues the quarrel with big ideology, this time in the denouncement of democracy, Indian-style, the ostensibly desirable alternative to communism *(Cost of Living)*. If it is the author's intention that is under scrutiny, this denunciation would leave us yet again with the uncomfortable conclusion that it is greed and human nature that emerge as the culprits, regardless of the various ideological guises available to it. In the novel itself, it would seem that Marxism is only one among the human religions bankrupted by the contradictions introduced by the "pursuit of ascendancy" (*God of Small Things* 293). Its attempts to escape the specificities of place and time, its more general indictment of human nature for failing its own potential, and its preoccupation with biology and nature are intended to short-circuit the immediacy of historical context. These aesthetic mediations, however, may not be much of a match for the force field of representation within which the post-colonial text exists, unless we shift the emphasis in the poetics/politics nexus to poetics and its constitutively incommensurate relation to politics.

At the level of the novel's internal organization, that is, at the level of form broadly conceived, the emphasis on the small and the particular inevitably constitutes something of a retreat from pragmatic affairs. This relation of art to praxis is insightfully explored by Adorno in *Aesthetic Theory*. Although artworks, Adorno argues, must be considered "less than praxis" because "they recoil before what must be done, perhaps even thwart it," they are also in excess of it (241). Art "is more than praxis because by its aversion to praxis it simultaneously denounces the narrow untruth of the practical world" (241). In critiquing action "as a cryptogram of domination," art rejects it for its inability to avoid domination. Artworks "are a constant indictment of the workaday bustle and the practical individual, back of which is concealed the barbaric appetite of the species, which is not human as long as it permits itself to be ruled by this appetite and is fused with

domination" (242). In the novel, one might suggest, this practice is partially coded as omletteering, radical practice that proceeds at the expense of the eggs, so to speak, and without having overcome the appetite of the humans for ascendancy. To remain blind to the susceptibility of revolution to "the same abuses and temptations, manipulative frauds and wishful self-deceptions, as any other promotional line," as Berman explains in his evaluation of Marxist doctrine, is to dishonor Marx's commitment to the rending of delusory veils from social activity (130). Nevertheless, if Roy's indictment exposes the inability of praxis to defeat its immanent violence, it also constitutes a withdrawal from "what must be done": "Their [artworks'] principle, of which they cannot rid themselves," Adorno confides, "stalls the immediate practical impulse" (243). In *The Aesthetic Dimension,* Marcuse underscores the principle of nonequivalence to instrumental reason:

> The inner logic of the work of art terminates in the emergence of another reason, another sensibility, which defy the rationality and sensibility incorporated in the dominant social institutions. (6–7)

Adorno concedes that it is "doubtful" if "artworks intervene politically." If they do so at all, it is rather through "an extremely indirect participation in spirit that by way of subterranean processes contributes to social transformation" (242). The fundamentally asymmetrical relation of art to ersatz "reality" is thus the source of its power as well as its constraints. Adorno extols the capacity of art to communicate the already-known in ways that reinforce its "*a priori* distance from the empirical" (247). The social "content" is consumed within the logic of the artworks. The transformation of "hardly dewy-fresh insights" through aesthetic gestures is what gives art its tone.

> Brecht taught nothing that could not have

> been understood apart from his didactic plays, indeed, that could not have been understood more concisely through theory, or that was not already well known to his audience: That the rich are better off than the poor; that the way of the world is unjust; that repression persists within formal equality. (247)

If art cannot lend its tone to these jaded insights, if the content does not enter into the formal innovations of art, we should not recognize it as art. Nor, Adorno would suggest, would it have the value that is unique to art-in-itself. In discussing love in *Romeo and Juliet,* Adorno argues that

> Without the longing for a situation in which love would no longer be mutilated and condemned by patriarchal or any other powers, the presence of the two lost in one another would not have the sweetness— the wordless, imageless utopia—over which, to this day, the centuries have been powerless; the taboo that prohibits knowledge of any positive utopia also reigns over artworks. (247)

This is hardly the stuff of praxis, but it nevertheless comprises what Adorno refers to as the "truth-content" of art.[16] In light of the above remarks, the ending of *The God of Small Things* attains especial poignance. It is precisely the ending, however, that Ahmad finds "a pity" for many of the reasons that Adorno praises

in his reading of Shakespeare (105). Ahmad's description of the final scene of the novel, a meeting between Ammu and Velutha, recalls something of "the wordless, imageless utopia" Adorno found in *Romeo and Juliet:*

> Without a word spoken or any other indication passing between them, both arrive, in the thickness of the night, at the spot where they are to meet, as if by predestination. Night after night they return to the same spot, for a series of unions brief and utopic and so self-sufficient that the pasts simply fall away and the future is at once feared and ignored with the terrors of the Romantic Sublime. They become pure embodiments of desire, and significantly, not a word of intelligent conversation passes between them. (Ahmad, "Reading" 105)[17]

Ahmad's critique of the ending, moreover, is founded on the lack of "practical impulse" evinced by the characters:

> What is most striking about the final phallic encounter between Ammu and Velutha is how little it has to do with *decision* . . . the difference between decision and fatal attraction is that whereas decision, even the decision to

> accept suffering and or death, is anchored in praxis, in history, in social relationships chosen and lived in a complex interplay of necessities and freedoms, fatal attractions can never cope with such complexities and must be acted out simply in terms of a libidinal drive. (105–6)

Roy's "preoccupation with sexuality,"Ahmad complains, privatizes "pleasure and politics, which leads then to sheer aggrandisement of the erotic relation in human life, as a utopic moment of private transgression and pleasure so intense that it transcends all social conflicts of class, caste and race" (104).

Ahmad is quite right, of course, in describing the ending as a relegation of struggle to the province of "private transgression and pleasure." It might well seem that *The God of Small Things* aggrandizes the sorrows and joys of love, when the perceptive poet knows that "there are sorrows other than those of love," with a greater claim on our minds and souls, as Faiz argues in his inimitable lyric. But what is lost in the selective rendition of the novel's dénouement as purely private is the way in which libidinal pleasure is suffused with the other sorrows and joys of the world. Nor does the isolation of private pleasure to a purely private realm recognize the administration to which it is subject from the supposedly "external" world in which it struggles to find fulfillment. Faiz, too, would acknowledge these fetters in "A Few Days More" [Chand Roz Aur, Meri Jan] in the lines: "Jism par quaid hai, jazbat pe zanjiren hain / Fikr mahbus hai, guftar pe taziren hai" [Our bodies in prison, our feelings in chains / thoughts captive, our speech another's claim] (*Poems by Faiz* 79–81; my translation).

What Max Weber describes as "the greatest irrational force of life: sexual love" glosses precisely that ascetic rationality that the world adminsters so brutally and seeks to neutralize (343). Nor, indeed, is this a mode of administration unique to the "modern" world with its new technologies of surveillance and a market-

money economy. The caste system had initiated a division of labor *avant la lettre* and the small scale of village and town communities have provided an efficient mode of surveillance and containment of individual activities for centuries. The problem, then, is hardly one confined to the unique conditions of modern life; it is one that is bound up with the now timeless "love laws" that survive particular relations of production. The struggle, by the same token, can hardly define itself without a scope that encompasses this much longer history of the administration of human lives and feelings.

Moreover, an isolationist description of the import of the ending neglects to consider the aesthetic modality through which art is nevertheless able to achieve its "true social effect" that impacts politics but obliquely, through a possible rather than the probable praxis corresponding to the real:

> The effect of artworks is not that they present a latent praxis that corresponds to a manifest one, for their autonomy has moved far beyond such immediacy; rather, their effect is that of recollection . . . the process enacted internally by each and every artwork works back on society as the model of a possible praxis in which something on the order of a collective subject is constituted. (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 242)

The appeal of art proceeds precisely though "the affront to reigning needs, by the inherent tendency of art to cast different lights on the familiar," and it is through this mode of operation that artworks "correspond to the objective need for a transformation of consciousness that could become a transformation of reality" (243). In having separated itself from

"the prevailing realm of purposes," the artwork is able to imply "the promise of a condition in which freedom were realised" (Adorno, *Prisms* 23). In recomposing the given events into another order that derives from them and is yet other to the existing world, art communicates through its design that which could, but does not exist in actuality. It is important that we recall this composition as illusion, for it is in the alienation of this aesthetic reorganization from the reality principle that we might glimpse possibilities alternative to it.

If it is the zone of the merely erotic that offends, moreover, Chacko's unspecified adventures with the women from the pickle factory should occasion far more concern. These conjugations are offered as a contrast within the design of the text from which we might adduce the relation between sex and love, needs and feelings, desiring subjects and desired objects. Chacko's "libertine relations with the women in the factory" are accepted by Baby Kochamma and his mother as undeniable in the scheme of "Man's Needs." They see no "contradiction between Chacko's Marxist mind and feudal libido." Their worries are confined to the potential threat to the security afforded by their class: "They only worried about the Naxalites, who had been known to force men from Good Families to marry servant girls whom they had made pregnant" (160). The ironic use of "Good" in the arbitrarily capitalized "Good Families" reveals the narrator's contempt for their alleged goodness while also typifying the conventionality of these habits among young men from "Good Families" who can entertain their libidinal needs without sacrificing bourgeois respectability. Chacko's mother not only connives at her son's Needs, she builds a separate entrance for his room, "so that the objects of his 'Needs' wouldn't have to go traipsing *through* the house" (160–61). The social and cultural house can thus maintain its façade of bourgeois values without accounting for these peripheral disruptions to its integrity. She also slips the women some money because this transactional device relegates Chacko's affairs to their proper sphere: "The arrangements suited Mammachi, because in her mind, a fee *clarified* things. Disjuncted sex from love. Needs from Feelings" (161).

It is not my purpose to argue that the encounter between Ammu and Velutha devalues need. It does not discount need at all. Indeed, it expands and elevates need into biological compulsion:

Ammu moves toward Velutha "like an insect following a chemical trail" (312). It is biology that undoubtedly orchestrates their desire, their consummation stems no less from Need than Chacko's. Chacko's and Ammu's encounters are nevertheless rendered different by the social administration to which these needs are subject. Within the design of the novel, moreover, this difference is signaled in part through the strategy of specification, the making of a story from what is but one event among many, and all too apt to be lost among the worse things that have happened and will keep happening. The most defining difference from Chacko's dalliances arises from the social contract that is vectored toward "Man's Needs," when they are affordable to him. Neither Ammu, who has no "Locusts Stand I" in Ayemenem society, nor Velutha, who not only has no place but leaves no trace at all, no footprints, no ripples in the water, can afford the luxury of their biological Needs.[18] As they make love, we are told that "the cost of living climbed to unaffordable heights" (318). Without the knowledge of the tremendous price to be paid, admittedly more so for the untouchable Velutha than the upper class/caste Ammu, there is no "story" in their affair. It is by imbuing their encounter with narrative structure and juxtaposing this story with Chacko's miscellaneous adventures as summary description that the narrator expands incident into experience, event into story, sex into the idiom of love, madness, hope, and joy. The narrator's studied attempt to establish need as mutual is also part of the attempt to redefine the need structure in the Ammu/Velutha relation. In the moment in which Velutha sees Ammu as "a woman, . . . He saw. . . that he was not necessarily the only giver of gifts. That *she* had gifts to give him, too" (168). In this "escape" from the administered world of exchange, the man's "relation to the world" is "taken to be a human one. Then love can only be exchanged for love, trust for trust, etc." (Marx, *Early Writings* 193–94). The human rate of exchange contrasts sharply with that which prevails in the world of commodities. In re-presenting the events, the narrator chooses to leave us in an uncomfortable zone of libidinal desire, a rejected arena in which Adorno finds traces of the "petty bourgeois' hatred of sex," a realm of sensuousness that has historically invited the venom of critics (quoted in Marcuse, *Aesthetic Dimension* 66).

> Autonomous art is condemned as infamous sensuality. “Release of aesthetic-sensuous stimuli,” “artistic tickling of the senses” are presented as “basic conditions for the autonomization of art.” (67)

The rejection of sensuous experience as false affirmation and false reconciliation constitutes a denial of that which makes art suggestive, for this “hostility against happiness . . . does not want aesthetic autonomy” (Adorno, quoted in Marcuse 67). The hopeless hopefulness of the lover’s promise and history’s warning, “‘*Naaley.*’ Tomorrow” recuperates that which is lost in the tragedy of suffering. The promise serves as a compensation that can only emphasize loss, even if it cannot erase promise completely. “Even the cry of despair” and record of tragic events “still contains the potential to wring out enjoyment” (Adorno, quoted in Marcuse 66).[19] All may be lost in the world of instrumental reason, but something of love and joy yet remain in aesthetic sublimation:

> Art creates the realm in which subversion of experience proper to art becomes possible: the world formed by art is recognized as a reality which is suppressed and distorted in the given reality. This experience culminates in extreme situations (of love and death, guilt and failure, but also joy, happiness, and fulfillment) which explode the given reality in the name of a truth normally denied or even unheard. (Marcuse 67)

The novel's ending signals a fragile transcendence of the realm of historical life through the intensification of felt experience as redemptive, of a more equal exchange in which the sensuous structure is momentarily released from the press of social administration. The mutual objectification of the lovers, despite their variant class positions, takes feeling into the realm of the sensuous experience felt through the very pores of the skin. It is precisely this affective and sensuous dimension of Ammu's lovemaking with Velutha that Baby Kochamma seizes upon for opprobrium:

> She said (among other things), "*How could she stand the smell? Haven't you noticed, they have a particular smell, these Paravans?*"
>
> And she shuddered theatrically, like a child being force-fed spinach. She preferred an Irish-Jesuit smell to a particular Paravan smell.
>
> By far. By far. (75)

Baby Kochamma is well aware that it is at the level of the sensual that she can most successfully hope to instigate Mammachi's revulsion. The narrator reveals that "with that olfactory observation, that specific little detail, the Terror unspooled" (244). The narrator's editorial on the role of this detail in the mechanism of terror exposes the extent to which society has come to administer the most basic of our instinctual responses, adjudicating one sort of contact as repulsive and another as desirable, or at least as acceptable when conducted in the approved fashion. The very last segment of the novel focuses precisely on that dimension of Ammu and Velutha's contact that Baby Kochamma will isolate with the unique instinct of the social being who understands that the management of enjoyment is at least one of the dominant modes by which society not only

regulates human behavior but also preserves its hierarchies.

> That first night, on the day that Sophie Mol came, Velutha watched his lover dress. When she was ready she squatted facing him. She touched him lightly with her fingers and left a trail of goosebumps on his skin. . . . He took her face in his hands and drew it towards his. He closed his eyes and smelled her skin. Ammu laughed.
>
> *Yes, Margaret,* she thought. *We do it to each other too.* (321)

Earlier when the cook Kochu Maria greets Sophie Mol by taking her hands, raising them to her face, and inhaling deeply, Chacko explains to his daughter, "That's her way of kissing you." Margaret responds by saying "It's a sort of sniffing!" and asking, "Do the Men and Women do it to each other too?" (170). Ammu responds with a sarcastic "That's how we make babies" and an indignant "Must we behave like some damn godforsaken tribe that's just been discovered?" when she is asked to apologize (170–71). Ammu's belated second response, which will not be heard by Margaret, makes reference to her earlier self-consciousness about being perceived as less than equal to the "civilized"; it also acknowledges a world of the senses beyond the register of civilization and primitivism, one she and others struggle to keep at bay in their inordinate fear of nature itself. It is from this register of an unintelligible world that the novel's closing section draws its script for another world, "a better, happier place" that is yet to be (314).

The God of Small Things re-composes the possibilities in human nature into the cryptogram of yet another repetitive phrase in the novel: "Love, Madness, Hope, and Infinnate [sic] Joy." In *The*

Aesthetic Dimension, Marcuse suggests that "the inexorable entanglement of joy and sorrow, celebration and despair, Eros and Thanatos cannot be dissolved into problems of class struggle" (16). It is in the "life instincts" of love, madness, hope, and joy that society must seek its emancipation. Without this rooting "in the instinctual structure of individuals," Marcuse warns, "solidarity would be on weak grounds" (18).[20] Love, madness, hope and joy may not be "forces of production," but they connect with the realities of aesthetic experience and what Adorno calls "aesthetic comportment" as the basis for a renewed engagement with the other "that assimilates itself to that other rather than subordinating it" (*Aesthetic Theory* 331). These intensely personal emotions are nevertheless expansively human in an alternatively global sense. No less universal is their repression through the course of history. An atomistic ethics focused on or confined to the realism of the law or political rights for a group cannot incorporate the limitless range of freedom implied in the aesthetic. When nature lavishes on us "more than the bare necessities of existence," as Eagleton argues in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic,* freedom conceived on the order of instrumental reason as exemplified in the law, for instance, affords but a limited glimpse of another prize in which law and desire, reason and the body are able to be reconciled. It may be well to recall that for Marx himself, communism was "the necessary form and the dynamic principle of the immediate future, but communism is not itself the goal of human development—the form of human society" (*Early Writings* 167). Marx had set his eyes on a greater prize in which the goal was the "the real life of man" (Fischer 42), even if it is also true that communism was a "real and necessary factor in the emancipation and rehabilitation of man" (Marx, *Early Writings* 167). Ultimately, however, sense experience, sense perception, and sensuous need, "[proceeding] from nature," were to form the basis of this emancipation (164).

In the scheme of Roy's novel, moreover, love, madness, hope, and joy are transported beyond the human into the elemental world of nature itself. It is the smallest of creatures, "a minute spider who lived in a crack in the wall" that the lovers choose for their connection beyond themselves:

> Without admitting it to each other or themselves, they linked their fates, their futures (their Love, their Madness, their Hope, their Infinnate Joy), to his. They checked on him every night (with growing panic as time went by) to see if he had survived the day. They fretted over his frailty. His smallness. (321)

As it turns out, its is the spider who survives the uncertainties of the natural world: "He outlived Velutha. He fathered future generations. He died of natural causes" (321). It is man for whom "nothing like 'nature,'" idealized through the capacity for perceiving in it the shape of beauty, "yet exists" (Adorno, quoted in Jarvis 100). In sticking "to the Small Things" on the fourteen nights of their escape from history, the lovers acknowledge its burden without conceding its proscriptions. This is one of the more notable instances in the novel when the use of capitalization serves to redistribute the weight of significance from objective to aesthetic reality, from the "Big Things that ever lurked inside" to the "Small Things" that do not survive in the unequal struggle between Big and Small. That is why, the narrator tells us, "Each time they parted, they extracted only one small promise from each other: *Tomorrow? Tomorrow*" (321). In days to come, the small things will be forgotten, the loss of love, hope, and joy will be consigned to oblivion, and the single big story will survive in the historical record with due abridgment. In the aesthetic accounting, however, "those few dozen hours, like the salvaged remains of a burned house—the charred clock, the singed photograph, the scorched furniture—must be resurrected from the ruins and examined" (32). Those "little events, ordinary things" must be "Preserved. Accounted for" (32).

In unplotting the story and the little events, the narrator leaves us with the culminating vision of "tomorrow," transforming the already past through the workings of memory frozen at a moment when the morrow is yet to dawn. As Marcuse describes it,

> Art cannot show the present without showing it as past. What has become form in the work of art has happened: it is recalled, re-presented. The mimesis translates reality into memory. In this remembrance, art has recognized what is and what could be, within and beyond the social conditions. (*Aesthetic Dimension* 67)

Although I am hesitant to accord desire the status of political power as such, it is nevertheless in the longing that lingers when the known story is over, when the ones we know would die have died, that the promise of a better world that could have been is briefly exposed.[21] "Only in memory and longing," Adorno writes, "not as a copy or as an immediate effect, is pleasure absorbed by art" (*Aesthetic Theory* 14). It is in "reading backwards"—a habit the children develop early in life—into the events already past that the narrator recuperates the moment of longing that does not survive in the known record. This aesthetic "reconciliation" serves to emphasize the distance between suffering and the prospect of justice rather than to relegate the social world to irrelevance. A "redemptive" reading that seeks to recuperate this moment, however, resolves the problems of the social world as little as the aesthetic resolution of the text. It is precisely the distance between the prospect of love, hope, and joy and its realization in lived reality that such a reading can identify.

The fragile transcendence of the ending, suffused as it is with apprehensions of the terror to come, arises out of the way things are, without losing its capacity to know how they might be. Adorno describes this relation of art to material history as "the double character of art": "something that severs itself from empirical reality and thereby from society's functional context and yet is at the same time part of empirical reality and society's functional context." Aesthetic phenomena, "which are both aesthetic and *faits sociaux*" are unable to provide an alternative to the given conditions of real life, yet unable to conceal their

longing for the new (252). To seek from art a legible script for a better world is to capitulate to the very order that we hope is contradicted by art: "The necessity of art . . . is its nonnecessity. To evaluate art according to the standard of necessity covertly prolongs the principle of exchange, the philistine's concern of what can be gotten for it" (251–52). As Eagleton submits, "The transcendence of the artefact lies in its power to dislocate things from their empirical contexts and reconfigurate them in the image of freedom; but this also means that art works 'kill what they objectify'" (*Ideology of the Aesthetic* 351).

The inherent disproportionality between the matter of art and its aesthetic transformation does not deny its historical character; it merely contests our propensity to assign it a transparently social function construed by its exchange-value in the world of commodities. Based on an understanding of this principle of disproportionality and disadequation, a critical theory of aesthetics must recognize the limits of aesthetic representation as well its gestures of transcendence.[22] A theory that attempts to recuperate the redemptive capacity of art must nevertheless concede the location of art within the immanent and inescapable context of an administered society. At the same time, it must grant a meaningful space for the protest of the particular against the universal.[23]

The text itself suggests this dual character of art as a *fait social.* One of the lessons the children have learned from their Uncle Chacko is that "anything's possible in Human Nature . . . Love. Madness. Hope. Infinite joy" (112). Rahel's reaction to Chacko's observation is to isolate joy as the prospect most imbued with the air of tragedy:

> Of the four things that were Possible in Human Nature, Rahel thought that *Infinnate Joy* sounded the saddest. Perhaps because of the way Chacko said it.
>
> *Infinnate Joy.* With a church sound to it. Like a sad fish with fins all over. (113)

The child's unconscious conjoinment of joy with a vaguely messianic reference is replete with the longing of an insecure childhood as well as the yearning that is retrospective to the knowledge of a tragedy already past. The descriptions of Ammu and Velutha's identification of "their Love, their Madness, their Hope, their Infinnate Joy" with those of a minute spider's, evokes Rahel's childish distortion of the final phrase in the litany. Laden with the resonance of a utopia that has disappeared from human religions, the phrase is an orthographic and grammatical anomaly as well. For reasons of language *and* instrumental reason, as things stand, infinnate joy cannot be.[24] This profound understanding is nevertheless communicated with the heaviness of a longing that survives despite the tragedy already past. As Julia Kristeva notes in her reading of Proust,

> Childhood is indeed "the age when Names [offer] an image of the unknowable," which is let down by the reality of people and things but can . . . be recovered by the memory beneath the sound that once entranced the child's ear. (34)

The persistence of a child's sound-sense in the term "infinnate joy" remains a possibility to the very end, were it possible to recompose our language and our reason for that which is not yet, in the unknown image of that which has never been. The sound of the word, heard and misheard by the child Rahel, rings through in the supposedly anonymous report of the final scene of the novel, the anomaly now ranging beyond language and reason to the realm of the rules of novelistic narration.

In my earlier discussion of the concept of *mémoire involuntaire* in Proust's *The Remembrance of Things Past,* I have suggested the potential difficulty of realizing its power in the novel under discussion. In proposing the power of involuntary memory in the structural shape of *The God of Small Things*—a novel so dramatically formed by the psychic nonorder of memory as to

seem a textbook illustration of it—however, we are faced with a troublesome question: given that the narrative is delivered in the third person, *whose* memories are being rewoven, recollected, remembranced? Where is the remembering "I" who is lucky enough to have stumbled upon the treasure of recollection by the coincidence of association, the accident of encounter with that very material object in which the past is unmistakably present? Why is *Rahel's* memory of "infinnate joy"—revealed in the orthographic anomaly of the last passages— voiced by a third person, even though it is clearly focalized through her? No intact "I" is made available in *The God of Small Things* to unify experience in the psyche of the one in search of lost time. There are memories but there is no remembering *self*. To put it another way, even though there is no unifying remembering self, there are memories. Is the textual device of the third person a response to the dissociative mechanisms of the psyche in response to traumatic events, or does the text thus signal the fundamental separation of the experience and its representation through anonymous narration? The narrative voice seems irresistibly drawn to identification with the persona of Rahel—for it is she who hears the word as "infinnate"; yet it resists this identification and the integration of remembrance with a remembering subject. The text's refusal to establish an exclusive relationship between memory and person suggests that the custodian of memories is neither one self nor a collective subject but a dramatically *third* person who can remember, or remembrance, what it did not, could not have experienced, at least in its entirety.

What is the possible significance of this stance in helping us to reconceptualize the existing axiomatic vocabulary for dealing with trauma that is both personal and profoundly historical? As the classic choice of nineteenth-century realism, the third-person account has been much reviled for its misleading propositions about ontological reality and its disregard for individual subjectivity and its constitutive historical and psychological coordinates. Organized by the principle of explanation, as opposed to the first-person account's privileging of understanding, would it not be fair to conclude that the third-person account capitulates to the reductive new order of the development of capital in which no event comes to us "without already being shot through with explanation," as Benjamin bemoans (*Illuminations* 89)? One

response to this desperate impasse is to recover a poststructuralist conception of subjectivity that alerts us to subjectivity as constructing and constructed, in other words, as it operates in an always already third-person mode, signaling its fundamental fragmentation. Another is to propose a psychoanalytic model in which the necessarily dissociative machinery of the traumatized psyche projects both experience and the experiencing subject outside the self. Neither account would be sufficient for Roy's project, which does not confine itself to the experiences of a single self, which transcends the notion of a constructed subjectivity by engaging in remembrance of things not only long past but beyond the reach of historical time and its determinative influence on subjectivity, and which insists on an understanding of small things in the concurrent scale of geological time and personal experience.

What kind of ethical positions might we adduce from the novel's dedication to "preserving," pickled and indistinguishably jam-jelly like in their indeterminacy, the integrity of memories that move toward and yet resist identification with any single character or narrating self? Why does the novel make it so difficult for us to answer the question, whose memories unite the narrative, given the mixture of omniscient narration, editorial description, and excessive focalization (first and second order)? The choice of third-person narration is sometimes recommended by instructors of creative writing because it gains the writer the flexibility of subplot, a plot that can be detached from the "principal" experiences of the protagonist. It permits the writer to explore the memories and experiences of an "other." In *The God of Small Things,* the narrator alerts us to another sort of capacity for *having* memories of events that could not have happened to oneself.

> Now, these years later, Rahel has a memory of waking up one night giggling at Estha's funny dream.
>
> She has other memories too that she has no right to have.
>
> She remembers, for instance (though

she hadn't been there), what the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man did to Estha in Abhilash Talkies. She remembers the taste of the tomato sandwiches—*Estha's* sandwiches, that *Estha* ate—on the Madras Mail to Madras.

And these are only the small things. (5)

What does it mean to refuse these boundaries between the first and an other, third person, at the intimate level of memory? This particular coincidence of memory apart (which may after all be explained away as the special gift of "Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities"), the entire novel relies on memory as the scaffolding for the building of the plot (5). The device of omniscient narration that is often associated with the choice of the third person is dramatically at odds with the underlying structure of a novel organized by the principle of memory. But without the self to remember, to be stirred by memories, and to return to "a place in time," remembrance must necessarily be construed as deeply ambivalent. Kristeva explains in *Proust and the Sense of Time,*

What the narrator calls an "enhanced" place in time—perceived by the senses, inaccessible no doubt but, as the prepositional form of "à la" indicates, always beckoning to us, remaining open and disposable as the self revolves around it—is the notion of *embodied time.* The time in which all of our sensations are reflected upon, as they tie the knot between subjectivity and the external

> world and recover once again the sounds that lie beneath the masks of appearance. (24)

The relation of the "self" to this sense of embodied time is integral to the remembrance of things past. As Proust himself describes it,

> This notion of *Time Embodied,* of years past but not separated from us, it was now my intention to emphasize as strongly as possible in my work. (quoted in Kristeva 24)

In what sense is it possible to discuss embodied time without the body to which its sounds and memories and smells are meaningful? The answer in the case of *The God of Small Things* may lie in a different dimension altogether. If personal history cannot be invoked as the unifying membrane that holds the memories together in a questing self, the answer may lie instead in unifying geography, in embodied space rather than in embodied time alone. In an earlier segment of this chapter, I pointed out that the first and last words of the novel, "May" and "tomorrow," are both "given" to time. I have also proposed, however, that the narrative use of the habitual present retains space as the focal unifier for the unfolding events. Point of view, which implies the spatial position of the narrator, is here supplemented by space as the fulcrum for the narrative. If we were to insist that focalization (who sees or who remembers, in this case) must be distinguished from voice (who tells), we would nevertheless remain with the quandary we began with, that is, the proliferation of memories presented that no one single character has the right to have, in a temporal scale that aspires to encompass geological time itself. In a scheme of zero focalization, associated with the third person, the intrusion of internal focalization associated with one character,

but assiduously never merging with it, complicates an identification of the narrator as a heterodiegetic narrator. It is not unusual, of course, for the internal and external modes of narration to merge: as Wayne Booth suggests, "Any sustained inside view, of whatever depth, temporarily turns the character whose mind is shown into a narrator" (164). A reverse process, however, appears to be in operation in *The God of Small Things.* It is not character, or character alone, that is necessarily transformed into narrator through multiple focalization, but the narrator who is obliged to carry the memory load of multiple characters, all-knowing but also all-feeling, collecting rather than re-collecting memories that exist in space as well as in embodied time. The "smell of old roses on a breeze," "history's smell," lingers through space as well as time, a lesson as well as a memory. Focalized through the perceptions and feeling of the children, two lessons are presented by the third-person narrative voice:

> Lesson Number One:
> *Blood barely shows on a black man.* (Dum dum)
> And
> Lesson Number Two:
> *It smells though,*
> *Sicksweet.*
> *Like old roses on a breeze.* (Dum dum). (293)

The narrator's lingering descriptions of the scene of events make of space and nature itself the repository of memory, each spot alive with its plangent resonance, recalling the terror that has taken place, as well as the remembrance and promise of things so deep into the past that they cannot be recalled so much as invented. The tarrying smell of old roses on a breeze remains long after the work of history through humans has completed its dire purpose, confined to no one memory but to geography and place

itself as abiding history. Within nature and its abundance lies the germinative power of recall, "like a fruit in season. Every season," rather than in the linear dimension of time and history (253). Locus itself is the *locum tenens,* the placeholder for memories, each house in Ayemenem "a tottering fiefdom with an epic of its own" (14). As Frances Yates points out in *The Art of Memory,* loci are "like the wax tablets which remain when what is written on them has been effaced and are ready to be written on again" (23). This conjunction is suggested on at least one occasion in the novel:

> Heaven opened and the water hammered down, reviving the reluctant old well, greenmossing the pigless pigsty, carpet bombing still, teacolored puddles the way memory bombs still, tea-colored minds. (11)

It is nature that provides the living text and this capacity for recalling the terror of the past, and the promise of a lost paradise that never was. When Velutha senses that the terror is beginning, his mind floats away and observes his body "walk through the darkness and the driving rain":

> More than anything else that body wanted to sleep. Sleep and wake up in another world. *With the smell of her skin in the air that he breathed.* (270)

In that other world transposed upon the same geographical space, the air itself would carry another smell, no longer the stale, sick-sweet smell of "old roses on a breeze" but that smell which *this* world will not allow him to enjoy without punishment. The "tomorrow" that is promised between lovers is one that must

necessarily belong to another world and another place, another space, for in the dimension of time it belongs to history and its henchmen. "What will never happen, can never be," Adorno reminds us in quoting Valéry, "has a fragrance of its own, scents the air" (*Notes to Literature,* I, 172). This sense of utopia (from the Greek, *ou,* not, no plus *topos,* place), cast within the scheme of memory and remembrance, is not so much one that must be recovered anamnestically, but which is conceived of as the remembrance *(Gedächtnis)* of "the not-yet-existing" (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 132).

In a very important narrative sense, the novel, any novel, is constructed by a remembrance of things past that did not happen and could not have happened outside its closed circuit. The foundational premise of fiction is the absence of the referent. Any self constructed by the narrative is necessarily in a third-person relation to it by definition because it must acknowledge narrativity as a condition of its "being." This logic of narrative representation establishes a narrator who stands in a precarious relationship to what happens in the world beyond because it can only relate what has happened as it has happened within the pages of the text, however similar to what happens in the real world. The nowhereness of the novel and the no-place of utopia are both composed, in some sense, from the grammar of noninstrumental rationality. The remembrance of things past thus includes that remembrance of paradise that never was, which is paradise because it never was. It is the nature that does not yet exist, the smell in the air that is yet to be, the tomorrow that never comes in which—paradoxically—individual love, hope, and infinite joy can exist. This is the never-known that must be remembered and redeemed from the past precisely *as* fiction. Adorno explains this relation to the new on the model of "a child at the piano searching for a chord never previously heard. This chord, however, was always there; the possible combinations are limited and actually everything that can be played on it is implicitly given in the keyboard" (*Aesthetic Theory* 32). The ability of the postcolonial novel to convey this longing, this sense of wanting, is the content of what is new. The work of memory and remembrance in *The God of Small Things* operates within this relation to the new as other and to memory itself as profoundly other to the subject unhappily alienated from it.[25] The sensuous intelligence communicated by

this longing for a new smell, a new air, must necessarily recall us to memory, but not the memory of one remembering self, nor many. In the "third" narrative that longs to join with a remembering self, but cannot, remembrance thus survives as a fragmentary possibility of that which never was, and therefore could not have belonged to one remembering self. At the same time, the narrative longs to be free of the remembering self but cannot, thus warning us that remembrance is meaningless *unless* it can be grafted onto the remembering self or selves who must collectively learn to attribute meaning to memory in these redemptive terms. In negotiating this delicate balance, the narrative of the novel veers between identification with a self through focalization and disidentification through the transference of memory to spatialized collectivity, to place as its most eloquent repository.

Geography is not history because it continues to be the repository of local and particular experience; precisely because it functions thus, because every house in Ayemenem is its own epic, because the air its people breathe even today carries the stale-sweet smell of old roses on a breeze—"history's smell"—because the river Meenachal tells the story of human domination of nature in its own unique idiom, it is geography that has become history in its absorption of experience. Place will tell, as much as time, if the history written, trapped, and sedimented within it is released from the spell of oblivion. The descriptions of landscape that commence the novel, therefore, suggest its capacity for sensuous remembrance, as a place filled with the scurry of small lives and with narrative, before and after one story of particular hopes of love, madness, hope, and infinite joy has unfolded. It is not simply, or not only, in the symbolic enervation of the Meenachal river that the story of human domination of nature parallels that of human domination of humans, but that the river, the trees, and the ground hold a memory in which "the inexorable entanglement of joy and sorrow, celebration and despair, Eros and Thanatos" must be constructed by the storyteller. This forceful conjunction of the land with the instinctual structure of human beings roots the emancipatory project in the illegible and overwritten text of nature itself.

The physical location provides and contains the discursive shape of the story, making location newly relevant not only as the

resistance of the local to the global but as written space, the geo*graphic,* with its own history. Local geography and landscape and the construction of memory from the narratives stored within them provide a structural framework for remembrance that can move beyond self and family to a larger collectivity, precisely through local inflection. The formal tension introduced by the author's choice of a third voice dramatizes the extraordinary relation between the individual particular and the universal that must conjugate in its particularity the shape of liberation, the liberation of the "whole, the total man." The dislocation of remembrance from self to space/place conjugates the relation between topos, locus, and topoi, between space (in memory or geography) as the means of argument and persuasion.[26] The import of the particular story is the creation of an enthymeme, a syllogism in which the gaps can be filled in, allowing for something like the universal collective subject through a recourse to what Aristotle calls koinoi topoi, or common topics.[27] Remembrance as a common topic or mode of thought in its longing for another, better conclusion to self-interest (a commonplace longing, as it were) is thus connected in these etymological junctions. The central question then is *how* space means. The domination and transformation of the landscape may well be of a piece with the pursuit of human self-interest, but part and parcel of the creative energy from which self-interest springs is the capacity for summoning up remembrance—not so much as a universal principle but as a doubling of locus within and without, of reading local signs for the commonplaces of collectivized remembrance. The memory of unknown loss—and therefore unknown fulfillment—is what the artist appeals to through the instantiation of a particular set of events reexperienced in memory, fictionalized so to speak, and thus remade while gesturing at what is still wanting. The author's now notorious interest in environmentalism and the destruction of rivers and land through maldevelopment projects suggest a proclivity for keeping an ear to the ground, for knowing the local to be the space from which to speak.[28] This "real" interest aside, the use of local geography and memory in the novel presents a formal argument for the relation between the universal and particular through this conjugation of space and time, geography and history, nature and humans.

The rewriting of space as the time of loss and longing unites topos with locus. The place of remembrance is thus both localized and commonplace, topos and locus/topoi, the land and nature something like the country of imagination. Our collective removal from this remembrance casts us necessarily in a third-person relationship to it. In the novel, the spurious authority of the third-person narrator and the consequent elision of the elite bourgeois mediator may well constitute a species of evasion and mystification, the abundant use of focalization through Rahel's memory an overdeft manipulation of the emotive power of the remembering self, and the conjunction of third-person narration with focalization a blatant exploitation of depersonalized authority without sacrificing the personal, but another function of memory cast into a third voice could surely be to remind us of this remove and our commonplace longings. The excessively fictional register of the third person and its placement within the structural logic of memory reinforce the need to continue the exchange between the self and its others, to invent and reinvent loss and longing, the evernew as nevernew, the work of mourning and invention never done. For the Frankfurt School theorists, Adorno in particular, reification is "not merely a relationship among men," but also "the domination of the otherness of the natural world" (Jay, *Adorno* 69). As a symptom of alienation, the third-person narrator signals not only the separation of self from memory and experience, but a more profound severance of humanity from nature itself, a forgetting and a failure of the intelligence that we must figuratively reimagine as inborn and native, a severance that the conditions of modernity have rendered all the more dramatic. The quest for another history in which the aesthetic shape of human liberation might be imagined must be rooted in a response to an other geography in which we may read the script of domination in small things past as well as the trace of a utopia that is yet to be. This world that exists neither in the present, nor existed in the past, must continuously be unforgotten. In an age in which the globe is more closely girded by capital than ever before, the literature that recalls us to this purpose may well be dubbed "third world" literature.

Notes

Introduction

1. Terry Eagleton points out in his introduction to *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* that "anyone who inspects the history of European philosophy since the Enlightenment must be struck by the curiously high priority assigned by it to aesthetic questions" (1). The aesthetic "returns with such persistence," he reasons, because, "in speaking of art it speaks of . . . other matters too [freedom, autonomy etc.]" (3). Eagleton condemns the dismissal of aesthetics as "bourgeois ideology," arguing that "there are meanings and values embedded in the tradition of the aesthetic which are of vital importance" to the pursuit of political goals, even if there are others that seek to defeat them (8, 415). Marx himself believed that the senses themselves must be humanized and educated to become human senses, suggesting the role of aesthetic cultivation in the project of emancipation.

2. All references to *Aesthetic Theory* in this book use Robert Hullot-Kentor's 1997 translation. In juxtaposing this later version with the 1984 translation by C. Lenhardt, as well as with the original, I have been struck by Hullot-Kentor's studied attempt to keep faith not only with Adorno's language, but his paratactical organizational structure as well. The centrality of form to the argument is maintained in Hullot-Kentor's rendition, offering a persuasive argument for using the newer translation despite its greater difficulty.

3. One hears this death knell clearly in Benjamin's declaration: "When the age of mechanical reproduction separated art from its basis in cult, the semblance of its autonomy disappeared forever" (*Illuminations* 226).

4. These considerations include the material and ideological conditions of cultural production as well its relationship to the politics of struggle. In historical terms, the compulsion to respond to the epistemological violence of colonial constructions of the ideologically and sociologically predictable "other" of colonial

discourse provides the disciplinary beginnings of the field. Said's *Orientalism,* Spivak's early essays and interviews, and Bhabha's theorizations of mimicry and hybridity belong to this phase of postcolonial exploration. Critical preoccupation with the process of othering in imperial discourse, explored through philosophical, historical, and metaphysical avenues, continues as a new version of imperialism takes shape in the course of economic globalization. Because "the relay has passed to neo-colonialism," as Spivak puts it, a new subject has been generated in the volatile Petri dish that now includes First World cultural politics: its longing for moral amnesty, and a resolute will to remedy curricular and associated ideological gaps in representation ("Transnationality" 71).

5. For an incisive account of "the doctrinal demands for the 'third-world' writer," see Brennan's *At Home in the World,* particularly pages 36–44.

6. See also George Levine's introductory essay in the volume *Aesthetics and Ideology.* The care of the aesthetic in readings of postcolonial literature has for too long been the love that dare not speak its name.

7. David Beech and John Roberts argue that the swing back in this direction stems in part from the anxious soul-searching of progressive academics faced with the demise of the Soviet Union (and the resultant "crisis of Marxism" and the ascendancy of political and cultural conservatism in the United States and United Kingdom) (quoted in Kester 17). The validity of this observation notwithstanding, it is no less important to consider the abiding relevance of Marx's own views on literature and the arts as the increasing politicization of literature (particularly "Third World" literature) assumes progressively vulgar proportions. Although Marx did not develop a systematic theory of aesthetics, art and literature nevertheless held an important place in his theory because of their capacity for recalling human sensuous needs beyond the physical necessities of life. At least one critic suggests Marx and Engels' inflected understanding of literature. Lunn, for instance, points out that "Unlike many later 'Marxist' literary critics, Marx and Engels themselves did not view most art and literature as simply a matter of class perspective or ideology. They recognized, of course, a literature of bourgeois apology, but many

of their observations are grounded in a richer and more complex terrain: much of the most interesting art, far from being reducible to class origins or ideological outlook, heightens our sense of the ironies, complexities, and contradictions of the historical pressure upon cultural activity" (21).

8. See also Michael Bérubé's *The Employment of English,* in which he argues that even the most narrowly "literary" works really can defamiliarize the familiar and renew perception and compel readers to imaginative sympathy, disgust, ecstasy, and terror.

9. For a critique of Critical Theory's inability to explore the nexus between theory and praxis more successfully, see Bubner, Friedman, and Slater.

10. Following Max Weber, the Frankfurt School members elaborate the idea of instrumental reason as "the extension of (scientific) rationality to 'the conduct of life itself' . . . the secularization of life leads to a growth of means-end rationality, whereby there is 'the methodological attainment of a definitely given and practical end by the use of an increasingly precise calculation of . . . means'" (Held 65). With specific regard to literature, it is useful to also consider Martin Jay's elaboration of the idea of instrumental reason in Adorno's terms: "The qualitatively different and non-identical was forced into the mould of qualitative identity" (*Adorno* 37).

11. See Baxandall and Morawski for an elaboration of Marx's views on this subject, especially 69.

12. For an understanding of these terms, see *Aesthetic Theory,* 54–55.

13. See Raymond Williams's definition of "native" in *Keywords* in which he explains its positive and negative connotations (215–16).

14. From the ominous date of 1603 onward, the usages of the term conjoin with another that we also associate with land and its tilling, viz. colonization. The terms "native" and "colonial" both share a linguistic relation to "land," each in divergent and antagonistic ways, the one through origin and the other through a more violent possession. The etymological derivations of the terms "native" and "intelligence" and associated usages have been drawn

from the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

15. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* reports, the term "native" connotes connection to land but not fixity: "One born in a place; one connected with a place by birth, whether subsequently resident there or not."

16. Some of these issues have been addressed in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's widely circulated "Can the Subaltern Speak?" without this intervention, however, having depressed the need in the First World for plausible and intelligible postcolonial articulations.

17. Spivak has recently explored the figure of the native informant in all its complex figurations under the sign of global capital in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present.*

18. See Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind,* 1–16.

19. As Nägele notes in his discussion of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* book, "What is at stake is the isolation and separation of the aesthetic sphere from others. The work of isolating is double-edged, like concentration: it is a philosophical requirement, necessary for the precision and purity of philosophical concepts; but, as Freud discovered, it is also a work of disconnecting troubling and disturbing connections, as such a defense mechanism against threatening forces" (212).

1. The Practical Discipline

1. See Appiah, Hall, Matsikidze, McClintock, and Shohat for some expressions of discontent with the term "postcolonial" and its usages.

2. I am grateful to Maureen Daly Goggin and Steve Beatty for drawing my attention to this powerful theory in economics. Using the work of W. Brian Arthur, Goggin and Beatty describe self-reinforcing mechanism as a theory "that offers a robust explanation of how and why inferior technologies and systems succeed despite superior alternatives." The conjunction of theories from discourse studies and economics in this chapter is deliberate given that we are discussing a field openly accused of trafficking in (self)commodification.

3. As Aijaz Ahmad points out in "The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality," the term "postcolonial" "was to be used increasingly not so much for periodisation as for designating some kinds of literary and literary-critical writings, and eventually some history-writing, as *generically* postcolonial, while other writings in those same domains of literature, literary criticism and history-writing presumably were not" (7). This aggrandized sense of the term, as connoting generic definitions of periods, authors, and writings has gathered force, Ahmad proposes, through a system of mutual citations and cross-referencing among a handful of influential writers and their associates.

4. As noted, inter alia, by the editors Barker, Hulme, and Iversen in their introduction to *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory,* "there is little dispute that the catalyst for much of the new work that has resulted, and still an indispensable reference point, was Edward Said's *Orientalism*" (1). The field and the use of the term gained unprecedented momentum after the publication of a text that does not describe itself as postcolonial but that was accompanied or followed by several important texts and conferences that drew in Said's critique of Western constructions of the Orient into a disciplinizing postcolonialism. Soon after, the publication of the proceedings of the 1982 and 1984 symposia at Essex (Barker et al. 1983, 1985) and the autumn 1985 special issue of *Critical Inquiry* on "Race, Writing, and Difference" drew attention to other names that would become very well known in connection with postcolonial studies, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Homi Bhabha, Abdul JanMohamed, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, among others.

5. See also Brydon and Kirpal for a discussion on the problems of the term "commonwealth."

6. Critics of commonwealth literature, Brydon objects, have ignored the "wealth" that such literature has to offer: "To recognise what we hold in common is not to underestimate our differences, but to provide us with a context for understanding them more clearly" (6). Trinh T. Minh-ha points to the power of a term like "Third World" when used subversively by those whom it names (97). Ella Shohat, too, suggests that "the term 'Third World' does still retain heuristic value as a convenient label for the imperialized formations, including those within the First World"

(111). Others have commented on its power when used subversively by those usually described by it.

7. On the similarities of the postcolonial and postmodern project, see Childs and Williams; During.

8. Barker, Hulme, and Iversen marshal a similar argument in their observations on the relation between postcolonialism and postmodernism.

9. Heinemann, Longman, Penguin, the Women's Press, Karnak, Routledge, Verso, Duke University Press, and the University of Minnesota Press have provided tremendous support for publications in postcolonial literature and theory.

10. See, for instance the numerous recent readers and discussions on Fanon, C. L. R. James, and Glissant.

11. See Stoler's discussion on Europeans in the colonial Dutch East Indies for a repudiation of the lack of differentiation in the use of the term "European."

12. Stuart Hall's is a poignant response to this sort of contradiction in postcolonialism: "But isn't the ubiquitous, the soul-searing, lesson of our times the fact that political binaries do not (do not any longer? did they ever?) either stabilise the field of political antagonism in any permanent way or render it transparently intelligible?" ("When Was the 'Post-Colonial'?" 244).

13. The ease with which European imperialism gained hold in the colonies was certainly due to their superior resources and to what JanMohamed refers to as a "primarily. . . *material* coercion" but it was also of the willingness of subjects to be colonized in subsequent phases ("Dominance" 8). The question here is not whether native complicity makes colonialism more or less right or wrong, but what does it mean for postcolonial societies today? Until this unpalatable question is examined, it may not be possible to recognize the ways in which previous subjects of the empire are now willing to be *neo*colonized. In this context, the "neocolonized" might benefit from the reminder that the "multinational" is not only "them" but also "us."

14. See Spivak's comments in "Transnationality and Multiculturalist Ideology."

15. See, for instance, the catalog of peasant, tribal, and other resistance movements in Claude Alvares's *Science, Development,*

and Violence or the discussion of powerful grassroots ecofeminism in Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive.* As I concede the importance of registering resistance I am nevertheless inclined to agree with Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's conclusion that while "ecological movements . . . leftist peasant organizations; caste-based agitations; the women's movement; and of, course, various communal, linguistic, and regional demands for autonomy are significant oppositional aspects of the political life of the postcolonial Indian nation," we should be "doubtful about the extent to which they have found their theorists" (609n24). Early in the course of the development of postcolonial studies JanMohamed points out, "In theory we are never entirely encapsulated by hegemonic colonialism. Thus the task of theory and criticism is to enlarge this gap in a systematic and practical way" ("Dominance" 10).

2. Uncommon Grounds

1. In *Postnationalist Ireland,* Richard Kearney claims that "when one speaks of the 'Irish community' today, one refers not merely to the inhabitants of a state, but to an international group of expatriates and a subnational network of regional communities. This triple-layered identity means that Irishness is no longer coterminous with the geographical outlines of an island. The diaspora both within and beyond the frontiers of Ireland (over seventy million claim Irish descent) challenges the inherited definitions of state nationalism" (99). More frivolously, Eagleton in *The Truth about the Irish* defines them as "a mythical folk. There is no single bunch of people called the Irish. Instead there are Gaelic-Irish, Norman-Irish, Anglo-Irish, Scots-Irish, Danish-Irish and nowadays a sprinkling of Chinese-Irish too" (104). In a more serious vein, the question of Irish postcolonial identity inevitably raises uncomfortable questions about the status of Northern Ireland. These complications together bedevil references to "the Irish" as a collectivity because claims and arguments for a postcolonial identity are associated both with the Republican ideology of the Sinn Féin and political discourses in the Irish Republic, not to mention their overseas constituencies.

2. The last is a reference to David Lloyd's impressive

investigation of “Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment,” his subtitular subject in *Anomalous States,* which concludes with a phrase characterizing Ireland’s as a “*putatively* ‘post-colonial’ culture” (155; emphasis mine). In his review of the book, Colin Graham observes that the phrase “in many ways belies what precedes it. The certainty and complexity of Lloyd’s post-colonial assumptions could be seen to render spurious the ‘putative’ in its closure” (29). Lloyd’s investigation, however, is not so much an attempt to settle the issue of Ireland’s postcolonial identity as it is a comment on the dispersal of “the post-colonial moment among the episodes and fragments of a history still in process” (11). Lloyd’s stance would seem to constitute an acknowledgment of the ongoing controversy about the concept of postcoloniality rather than a simplistic vote on either side of the issue. In his subsequent *Ireland after History,* Lloyd acknowledges that “to assert that Ireland is and has been a colony is certainly to deny the legitimacy of British government in Northern Ireland,” but this position does not “confer automatic legitimacy on any armed insurrectionary movement” so much as it demands “that the phenomenon of violence must be understood as constitutive of social relations within the colonial capitalist state” (3).

3. No less significant, however, has been Edward Said’s stance on the debate. Edward Said folds the Irish experience more or less seamlessly into postcolonial history in *Culture and Imperialism.* In the following observation, for instance, negritude, Islam, and the Celtic spirit coexist harmoniously within the same framework: “In Post-colonial national states, the liabilities of such essences as the Celtic spirit, negritude, or Islam are clear: they have much to do not only with the native manipulators, who also use them to cover up contemporary faults, corruptions, tyrannies, but also with the embattled imperial contexts out of which they came and in which they were felt to be necessary” (16). Despite Said’s notable interventions in *Culture and Imperialism* and “Yeats and Decolonization,” Ireland and Irish literature are not easily accommodated under the otherwise capacious postcolonial umbrella.

4. Many theorists of Irish history and literature argue for a “richly intercolonial experience,” as Catherine Candy phrases it in her essay on comparative feminisms and imperialisms in India and

Ireland. Vincent Cheng suggests that "in *Finnegan's Wake* Indian colonial domination by, and resistance to, English imperial rule is represented (or co-presented) by Joyce as parallel to and synonymous with Catholic Ireland's subservient relationship to Protestant England" (*Joyce, Race, and Empire* 287). In light of his parody of what Joyce calls "coglionial expancian," David Spurr argues that "the *Wake* declares its independence from imperial structures of discourse in order to create a text that one may call, in terms that sometimes prove useful, both postmodern and postcolonial" ("Writing in the Wake of Empire" 873). On the intercolonial experience in history, see also P. Richard Davis and H. V. Brasted.

5. The current debate among Irish critics over the ersatz postcoloniality of Irish identity was sparked and fueled by the activities of the Field Day Theatre Company, its theatrical productions, pamphlets, and its ambitious but highly controversial anthology. Field Day was born when Stephen Rea contacted Brian Friel about launching a theatrical company in Derry, with ready financing from the Northern Ireland Arts Council. Friel and Rea were later joined by Seamus Heaney, Seamus Deane, Tom Paulin, and David Hammond. In the words of its architects, "The Field Day Theatre Company was founded in 1980 by Brian Friel and Stephen Rea. Its birthplace and centre of operations was and continues to be the city of Derry in Northern Ireland" (Field Day Theatre Company, preface, vii). The directors in the Field Day Company "believed that Field Day could and should contribute to the solution of the present crisis by producing analyses of the established opinions, myths and stereotypes which had become both a symptom and a cause of the current situation" (ibid.). Brian Friel's *Translations,* destined to become "un classique national" according to Martine Pelletier, was their first production (133). In recent years, numerous other publications in Irish studies have also attempted to demonstrate their embrace of a postcolonial mentality but it is Field Day, as W. J. McCormack claims, that has "set the terms of the current debate in Irish criticism" (55). It was Seamus Deane who recommended the launch of the Field Day pamphlets that would raise the polemic profile of the group. Equally instrumental in bringing the group attention was the increasing use of postcolonial ideas. As Shaun Richards vouches, "the period from at least the mid-eighties to the present" in the

company “has been dominated by the influence of writers such as Franz Fanon, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak, the architects of colonial and post-colonial criticism” (“Placed Identities” 55). This identification has drawn considerable fire from other Irish critics. Given the regnant antagonisms among various Irish constituencies, the post-colonial is seen as an altogether too convenient conceptual poetic that practices politics by other means. Richards comments on the group’s “ever-more ambitious programme of cultural intervention in the politics of, particularly, Northern Ireland, whose situation it reads as unambiguously colonial” with “a real political-cultural consequence” (“Field Day’s Fifth Province” 139, 142). “At the heart of the Field Day programme,” notes Richards, “lies the concept of the fifth province whose essence is “the idea of unity” (140), a vantage point from which all parts of “contemporary Ireland might be seen in fact as coherent” (Deane and Kearney quoted in Richards, “Field Day’s Fifth Province” 140). The cultural nationalism of this move has alarmed many, with Eavan Boland accusing the Field Day pamphleteers of “green nationalism and divided culture” and Longley fearing that Field Day was writing “Northern Protestants out of history” and yearning “for Edenic oneness as opposed to pluralistic fusion” (both quoted in Richards, “Field Day’s Fifth Province” 142, 144). Decrying its selectivity, Longley has criticized the Field Day anthology because it “favours theorists who might help to insert Northern Ireland/Ireland into the colonial/post-colonial frame (especially its simpler models),” concluding wryly that “strange collusions are taking place: intellectual holiday romances in a post-colonial never-never land” (Introduction 28).

6. *Act of Parliament,* 28 Henry VIII, C. 15, 1537. Cited in Coolahan (77).

7. Comparing the Irish situation with other colonized peoples’, Kiberd notes that “Nigerian children found themselves sweating through Corneille’s *El Cid* at much the same time that V. S. Naipaul in Trinidad was straining over Dickens, and Irish students were picking their way through the essays of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch” (86). Kiberd emphasizes the commonality of the impact of certain aspects of colonialism. Citing the comments of Daniel Corkery on the education of the Irish child, Kiberd suggests that

"Ngugi's report from Kenya reads in places like a paraphrase of Corkery, a man whose work in all likelihood he did not know" (556). One critic of colonial textbooks declared that "you might have introduced them into a school in Canada or into a school in Africa, as appropriately as into a school in Ireland" (quoted in Coolahan 87).

8. We are reminded by Declan Kiberd that when Conor Cruise O'Brien lost his position in 1961 over his handling of affairs in Katanga, he described himself as "an unimportant, expendable civil servant" who "had just received the backing of a less expendable man, Prime Minister Nehru of India, leader of a sub-continent" ("Modern Ireland" 91).

9. Ernest Renan claims that "If it be permitted us to assign sex to nations as to individuals, we should have to say without hesitance that the Celtic race, especially with regard to its Cymric or Breton branch, is an essentially feminine race . . . [the celtic race] has worn itself out in taking dreams for realities, and in pursuing its splendid visions" (58).

10. More recently, President Mary Robinson "told the Somalis that they were the Irish of Africa," before proceeding on to the United Nations to plead for international aid on their behalf: "In her continuing focus on the 'Third World' and on Irish anticipations of that experience, she reinvigorated many debates of the revivalist generation" (Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* 579).

11. "No experience has been more native to Ireland than leaving it," Eagleton quips in *The Truth about the Irish* (105). The glibness aside, the fact of the diaspora features prominently in the Irish imagination, providing a useful comparative— and contrastive—case for the study of other diasporas following from the colonial experience. In *The Lie of the Land: Irish Identities,* journalist Fintan O'Toole claims that "Ireland is a diaspora, and as such it is both a real place and a remembered place, both the far west of Europe and the home back east of the Irish-American" (12).

12. Dawn Duncan refers to "colorization" and "continentalization" as the criteria used to exclude the Irish, "the victim being neither dark-skinned nor non-European" (1).

13. An analogy with American blacks, Gilley emphasizes, is

eventually untenable. If Gilley contends that the analogy with "the oppression of the black people cannot be fully sustained," it is also true that "far more important for understanding the distinctive character of Irish stereotypes was the analogy with the native Americans, or American Indians, an analogy, moreover, which had a foundation in the shared historical experience of being at the receiving end of the first systematic wave of colonial expansion" (quoted in Gibbons, "Race" 97).

14. Critics have argued, of course, that the lack of visual difference only served to exacerbate the discomfort of the English. As Gibbons observes, "the 'otherness' and alien character of Irish experience was all the more disconcerting precisely because it did not lend itself to visible racial divisions" (96). Gibbons goes on to substantiate this observation by quoting remarks made by Charles Kingsley on a visit to Sligo, Ireland, in 1860: "I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. . . . to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours" (quoted in Gibbons 96). Kiberd comments that "the Irish, despite their glibs and mantles, actually looked like the English to the point of undetectability. . . . It was, perhaps, a subliminal awareness of this resemblance which distressed Spenser, as it would so many of his contemporaries and successors" (*Inventing Ireland* 11). Ania Loomba notes in her comment on Kingsley that the "the lack of colour difference *intensified* the horror of the colonial vis-à-vis the Irish" (109).

15. See Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White.*

16. English historian Edward Augustus Freeman commented in 1881, "America would be a grand land if only every Irishman would kill a negro and be hanged for it. I find this statement generally approved—sometimes with the qualification that they want Irish and negroes for servants, not being able to get any other" (quoted in O'Connor 253). The practice of indenturing the Irish and other whites obviously operated on extraracial grounds. O'Connor observes the general use of indentured white servants, "very many of them Irish men and women—who were bought and sold like chattels by their Christian masters. . . . In 1729 an act was passed placing a duty on 'Irish servants imported into this province,' and it remained in place for almost a hundred years. It

established that Irish servants could be legally sold by merchants and sea captains. (Ten pounds could buy a freedom-loving Pennsylvanian an Irish slave for five years.) A later law defined these indentured servants as 'a legal property' and stated that an owner could 'sell or bequeath them: and like other chattels, they are liable to be seized for debts'" (O'Connor 199, 200).

17. In general, Kiberd adds, "The Indians were far more likely to proclaim their solidarity with the Irish than *vice versa*" (259). Stephen Howe reaches much the same conclusion in *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture.*

18. The installation of intercolony hierarchies through the offices of the British educational system effected a pernicious system of racialism among the colonized, forever preventing a common sense of purpose. The following extract from Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* reveals the imbrication of the educational and the political project in the colonial classroom: "'The sun never sets on the British Empire,' says Miss Lumley, tapping the roll-down map with her long wooden pointer. In countries that are not the British Empire, they cut out children's tongues, especially those of boys. Before the British Empire there were no railroads or postal services in India, and Africa was full of tribal warfare, with spears, and had no proper clothing. The Indians in Canada did not have the wire or telephones, and ate the hearts of their enemies in the heathenish belief that it would give them courage. The British Empire changed all that. It brought in electric lights" (79). The quoted passage encapsulates two imperial goals, one being to instill a sense of relative scale of worth among the people of the world and the other to convert the student to a belief in a selective measure of worth. Ideological conversion was a mainstay of the imperial mission and, obviously enough, hardly confined to the Irish context alone.

19. Steven Ellis argues for a different reason for the distinctiveness of the Irish experience in that "uniquely in the case of Ireland, a separate kingdom belonging to the English crown was created out of the medieval lordship, with institutions such as a separate parliament and peerage, the extension of the rights of free-born Englishmen to the Gaelic peoples there, and Ireland's incorporation as a member of the one body politic or, later, as a constituent kingdom of the British state" (9).

20. Coolahan provides further examples of the enfolding of Ireland within Britain's national project. The following item in the *Second Reading Book* stresses geographical contiguity and linguistic commonality: "On the East of Ireland is England, where the Queen lives, many people who live in Ireland were born in England, and we speak the same language and are called one nation" (85).

21. In a letter to Alice Stopford Green and William Cadbury, Irishman Roger Casement suggests the unique capacity for empathy for one colonized people for another: "It was only because I was an Irishman that I could understand *fully,* I think, the whole scheme of wrongdoing at work in the Congo" (quoted in Porter 267). Howe concedes the existence of a sort of solidarity based largely on anti-British sentiment, concluding soberly, however, that "it would appear that nineteenth-century Irish nationalists and Home Rulers were no 'worse,' if perhaps also no better, in their racial and colonial attitudes than their contemporaries among English Radicals, Chartists and early socialists" (47).

22. There are those, however, who would argue that even if the Irish Catholic did not participate outright in colonial ventures, and there is no conclusive evidence substantiating this, they did participate "with full Victorian vigour in the task of cultural imperialism, bringing European religious and cultural values to 'Darkest Africa,' and beyond" (Kennedy 115). In an interview with Dympna Callaghan, Seamus Deane says, "The other Irish experience that hardly registered in what you might call official literature, and even many of the historical accounts of modern Irish experience, is the little Irish empire of missions, especially in Africa and Latin America. That's a relation to the Third World that has been in some ways a constant concern in Ireland. People thought of the missionaries as saving souls for God and for Ireland" (43). In Brian Friel's play *Dancing at Lughnasa,* Father Jack seems to have capitulated to the pagan spirituality he found among the Ryangans of Uganda. With the new Jesuit endeavors, Deane proposes, "once more a relation is being defined and described between Ireland and the Third World in which Ireland is able to claim that we are not of the Third World, but are rather First World helpers of it, whether spiritually or economically" (43). Kiberd, however, contends, albeit without substantiation,

that “tens of thousands of Irish missionaries were made welcome in the 1920s and 1930s [in the developing world], since they came with no political agenda” (“Modern Ireland” 91). O’Toole writes that “the extraordinary missionary tradition which sent thousands of Irish priests and nuns to a ‘spiritual empire’ in Africa, Asia and Latin America has, in a sense, reversed itself, with returned missionaries importing ideas of liberation theology and the option for the poor, ideas which threaten rather than reinforce, the Church’s place within Irish power structures” (73).

23. However, even this commonality might be redefined in terms of Ireland’s colonial experience in the view of some critics. Robert Welch, for instance, suggests that Ireland’s transformation into a European nation is a disjunctive and anomalous process in that it was mediated by the shaping experience of colonialism: “Ireland, unlike most other European countries, did not have the opportunity of fully experiencing the experiments of individualism, enterprise, collectivity and modernization that are known as the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Being a colony of England, Ireland was cut off; her people experienced Europe, in the modern period, that is to say from about 1600, through an English transmission” (1). “We are dealing, in Ireland’s case,” Welch insists, “with an example of almost completely successful colonial takeover” (1).

24. The Irish experience is by definition precluded, for instance, in Helen Tiffin’s interpretation of the postcolonial as defined by “writing and reading practices grounded in some form of colonial experience occurring outside Europe but as a consequence of European expansion into and exploitation of the ‘other’ worlds” (“Post-Colonialism” 170).

25. If it once was postcolonial, that is, part of the Third World, it cannot now claim that distinction. If we were willing to turn the clock back from the present, however, a case could more easily be made. “At the turn of the century,” Vincent Cheng claims in *Joyce, Race, and Empire,* Ireland, “devastated by centuries of famine, poverty, and rule by English landlords—was virtually a Third World country under British domination” (2). Eagleton reports that “up to the 1960s, Ireland had many of the features of a Third World country” (*The Truth about the Irish* 37). Those who now apply the economic gauge to Ireland would be obliged to concur

with Kennedy's conclusion that "like a good photograph, the figures speak volumes. Suffice it to say that Ireland inhabits a world other than the Third World" (112). As David Lloyd points out, Kennedy's failure to account for the impact of "one major demographic, cultural and economic phenomenon . . . emigration" certainly alters the credibility and import of his statistics, but it is nevertheless impossible to ignore Kennedy's protest that "the attempt to equate life in contemporary Ireland" with the Third World in the present moment is "to trivialise the suffering of hundreds of millions of the world's peoples" (*Ireland after History* 11, 120–21).

26. See Giddens and Habermas.

27. One need hardly add that the connotations of the term "national" need not be limited in connotation to *nationalistic* alone, even if the paucity of nationalistic expression is bemoaned by more than one postcolonial critic who had hoped for nation building and meaningful decolonization to be at least one of the goals of the postcolonial literary intelligentsia.

28. See Vincent Cheng's "Of Canons, Colonies, and Critics" for a fuller discussion of the politics and ethics of rereading canonical Irish writers in postcolonial terms.

29. On the subject of attention to contexts and the rooting of interpretation in particularities in the Irish experience, see also Lawrence J. Taylor.

30. Antaeus, son of Poseidon and Gaea, is the giant of Libya who compelled all strangers passing through the country to wrestle with him. Whenever Antaeus touched his mother Earth, his strength was renewed, so that even if thrown to the ground he became more powerful. Hercules overcame him by lifting him into the air, in effect displacing him and his connections to the strength-giving earth.

31. See Terry Eagleton's elaboration of this Benjaminian idea, "Truth is the death of intention," in *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism,* especially on 117.

32. See also Thomas C. Foster (71).

33. Like other critics, Andrew Murphy agrees that "Antaeus serves as a figure for the native communities who opposed the advance of colonialism throughout the world," concluding that

Heaney's position is as follows: "The struggle of these traditional, pastoral, earthbound societies was . . . always doomed to failure, as they faced an adversary whose technological advantage and whose world-view always outstripped and exceeded that of the communities who resisted them" (47). In "Fusions in Heaney's *North*," David Lloyd states that "Heaney fashioned this list [of "national military heroes"] with an eye to chronological progression and cultural plurality" (85). Morrison suggests that the Antaeus poems could be read "as an allegory of the Protestant settlement of Ireland . . . but it is more a parable of imperialism generally" (59). Written, as the later Antaeus poem was, in the aftermath of Heaney's experiences at Berkeley, the sense of solidarity expressed in the poem is confirmed by Heaney's own comments on the influence of his sojourn in California: "The whole atmosphere in Berkeley was politicized and minorities like the Chicanos and Blacks were demanding their say. There was a strong sense of contemporary American poetry in the West with Robert Duncan and Bly and Gary Snyder rejecting the intellectual, ironical, sociological idiom of poetry and going for the mythological. I mean everyone wanted to be a Red Indian, basically. And that meshed with my own concerns for I could see a close connection between the political and cultural assertions being made at the time by the minority in the north of Ireland and the protests and consciousness-raising that were going on in the Bay area" (quoted in Morrison 59).

34. Hercules's victory over Antaeus, as Sidney Burris reminds us, was "an intellectual one because he discovered that holding the giant over his head would cause his eventual downfall" (96).

35. Michael Molino argues that if "on one level, the wrestling match between Hercules and Antaeus is an allegory of the Irish and British struggle in which the British finally defeat the Irish," the conflict "also represents . . . a struggle not with the British, but within the Irish themselves" (94–95). Molino nevertheless concedes that Antaeus "is representative of the Irish tradition and the myth of origin" (95). "In 'Making Strange,' *[Station Island],*" Cairns and Richards explain, "Heaney fragments himself into his two constituent parts, Antaeus and Hercules, the one 'unshorn and bewildered / in the rubs of his wellingtons,' the other 'with his travelled intelligence / and tawny containment, / his speech like

the twang of a bowstring,' and produces a synthesis as he, Heaney as a transcendent consciousness, stands between them, advised by a 'cunning middle voice' to 'Be adept and be dialect'" (145).

36. "'Hercules and Antaeus,'" Heaney explains to Seamus Deane, "traces a contest in which rational light finally conquers and illuminates the dark instinctual outlook of the tribe" (Hart 77). Heaney wishes to function Janus-faced, "looking back to a ramification of roots and association and forward to a clarification of sense and meaning" (*Preoccupations* 52).

37. Cairns and Richards suggest that "these dualities of male and female, intellect and instinct, are found throughout his work, forming a leitmotiv whose comprehension is central to its understanding, just as its recognition appears to have been crucial to Heaney's own poetic growth" (143). Preserving the dualities, Heaney nevertheless advocates their rapprochement: "The objective is to create an act of union between Antaeus and Hercules in which the historical inevitability which sides with the latter can be enriched by 'instinctive feel' and 'illiterate pleasure'" (145).

3. The Aesthetic Dimension of Representation

1. As Rainer Nägele and other critics point out, Benjamin's personal and institutional association with the Frankfurt School was at best, fraught. His influence on Adorno, and to a lesser extent on Marcuse, however, makes it impossible to consider Frankfurt School aesthetic theory without a consideration of Benjamin's ideas.

2. Other figures associated with the Frankfurt School include philosopher and sociologist Max Horkhemier, social psychologist Erich Fromm, cultural critic Leo Lowenthal, and philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas, among others.

3. Lukács's thought was to prove foundational for many of Adorno's formulations even if he resisted "Lukács's equation of truth with proletariat class consciousness" (Buck-Morss, *Origin of Negative Dialectics* 26). See also Adorno's review of Lukács's *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (Bloch et al. 151–76). Rodney Livingstone, Perry Anderson, and Francis Mulhern provide the

introductory presentations to the exchanges between various critics in the collection *Aesthetics and Politics,* and the translation editor is Ronald Taylor.

4. James Buhler's review of recent scholarship on Adorno begins with the acknowledgment that "difficult is a word that seems especially appropriate for Adorno's thought, nowhere more so than with *Aesthetic Theory,*" suggesting that Hullot-Kentor's 1997 translation only underscores "the profound difficulties of the text" (161). Hullot-Kentor himself candidly admits the difficulty in pursuing in *Aesthetic Theory* any "homogeneous substance that can be followed from start to finish" (xiv). The use of a paratactic organizational scheme in *Aesthetic Theory* compounds the difficulty, evading what Adorno himself described in his description of parataxes in "Parataxis: On Hölderin's Late Poetry," as "the logical hierarchy of a subordinating syntax" (*Notes to Literature* 131). "The untranslatability of Adorno," as Samuel Weber notes, "is his most profound and cruel truth" (15). In attempting to adhere as closely as possible to the original, Hullot-Kentor's new translation, juxtaposed with Lenhardt's 1984 translation, thus provides a useful, and sometimes corrective, gloss to the earlier translation, while illustrating the extent to which the difficulties of the text are only highlighted by yet another translation.

5. Benjamin's inscrutability was not without cost to his own career: "His study of the Ferman lamentation play was met with incomprehension by philosophers at the University of Frankfurt, from Hans Cornelius to Max Horkheimer. Cornelius insisted Benjamin retract his *Habilitationsschrift* because, besides being incomprehensible, it was impossible to discern whether it did indeed make a contribution to aesthetics" (Smith xxvi–xxvii). Generations of scholars since have struggled to recuperate the true Benjamin from the allusive and difficult texts that were rendered even more complex by the theorist's enduring messianism.

6. In his introduction to Adorno in a book of the same name, Martin Jay speculates that "Adorno would have had a principled objection to any attempt to render his thought painlessly accessible to a wide audience" (11). Jay reports that "when his friend Siegfried Kracauer once complained of a feeling of dizziness produced by reading one of Adorno's works, he was testily told

that only by absorbing all of them could the meaning of any one be genuinely grasped" (11). On the difficulty of Adorno's thought, see also Jameson, Nicholsen, and Rose.

7. As Lambert Zuidervaart observes, for instance, Adorno's conception of "artistic truth" "weds the disparate philosophical sources of his aesthetics . . . Kant's notion of beauty as a symbol of morality and Hegel's view of art as a semblance of truth; Marx's critique of ideology and Nietzsche's suspicion of the ideology of critique; Lukács's emphasis on social totality and Benjamin's stress on artistic fragments" (xvi).

8. The term "culture industry" was first used by Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* Characterized by "ruthless unity," the phenomenon ensures that "something is provided for all so that none may escape; the distinctions are emphasized and extended. The public is catered for with a hierarchical range of mass-produced products of varying quality, thus advancing the rule of complete quantification" (123). In a subsequent essay, Adorno clarified that the term referred to "standardization," "pseudo-individualization," and "the rationalization of promotion and distribution techniques" (Held 91).

9. Lunn also observes that many of Adorno's perceptions of mass culture "were blurred by an ethnocentric provincialism of one reared within the traditions of European high culture and unable to see much beyond it" (158).

10. Douglas Kellner argues that radical cultural criticism should avoid the terms "mass culture" or "popular culture" or the distinction between high and low culture because all of these terms are "ideological constructions" (117). Instead, he proposes, "It is preferable to analyze culture as a continuum with a diversity of ideological and counterideological moments. . . . Not only is there no one dominant ideology, but systematic studies of contemporary culture reveal that even film, television, and popular music are more conflictual, contested, and contradictory than the classical theory of culture industry assumes" (117–18). Of course, as Adorno himself notes, avant-garde and popular art "are torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up" (quoted in Livingstone et al. 156). In a more polemical vein, Geeta Kapur argues in *When Was Modernism* that "In India

primitive techniques, artisanal skills, iconographic references are much valorized; and the modern, comprising the indigenous and the avantgarde, has a two-way relay and a paradoxical politics." There is, moreover, "a strictly leftwing intervention in the process of defining Indian modernity" that gives "the emerging *tradition of the modern* in India the possibility of *not* being trapped in the citadel of high art" (301). Peter Uwe Hohendahl argues against a wholesale characterization of the high/low culture divide in Adorno's work, suggesting that in many essays and later ruminations, the original hypothesis about the culture industry first found in *Dialectic of Englightenment* underwent substantial revision.

11. In an interview with *BusinessWeek Online,* India's finance minister Yashwant Sinha echoes a sentiment shared by writers like Arundhati Roy: "You have to look at rural India, because the majority of the people live there, and you have to improve the quality of their life. So you have to traverse many centuries. On the one hand you are looking at modern telecom, information technology. On the other hand, you are dealing with rural roads, better seeds, and better fertilizers. So because India lives in many centuries, the policy package has to necessarily traverse these centuries." It is not only rural India, of course, that coexists in many centuries—construed in exclusively "developmental" terms by Sinha—but, as economic and cultural theorists are arguing, pockets of urban spaces as well. The shape of cultural and its economic subtext are increasingly best understood in fractal terms. See, for instance, Appadurai, Chakrabarty, Prakash, and Rast. Chakrabarty's summary of "the 'critique of modernity' debate in India" in "Modernity and Ethnicity" is particularly useful for an introduction to the major figures and issues in the debate.

12. Bruce Knauft frames the contemporary issues in the study of modernity thus: "How is modernity configured differently in different world areas? Addressing this question exposes alternative meanings of what it means to be modern. Conversely, the notion that modernity is a global process of 'development' can be critically reconsidered as a Western vernacular construction." Perceived thus, modernity is a phenomenon that varies not only across geographical space but temporal context as well.

13. In Adorno's view, "The products of the culture industry

were not works of art that were then turned into commodities, but were rather produced *from the very beginning* as fungible items for sale in the market place" (Jay, *Adorno* 122).

14. See Lunn 155.

15. Nor would this process have been possible without the labors of scholars who have undertaken the daunting task of interpreting Critical Theory. Among them I would note Susan Buck-Morss, Terry Eagleton, David Held, Fredric Jameson, Martin Jay, Eugene Lunn, Richard Wolin, and Lambert Zuidervaart.

16. In *Art and Enlightenment: Aesthetic Theory after Adorno,* David Roberts bluntly states that "the possibility of a theory of modern (postmodern) art must resist Adorno's siren song of the end of art" (27). Other writers have sought to complicate Adorno's pronouncements on the end of art, while insisting on the concordance between Adorno and post-structuralist thinkers. See Peter Dews, Martin Jay, and Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaart.

17. S. S. Prawer reports that "in his private life Marx constantly demonstrates the way in which literature may embellish, enliven and heighten existence. . . . He reads tales and poems with his children. . . . As a public figure too, as author and as orator Marx constantly draws on the writers of the past and present whose work he admires" (415).

18. Certain aspects of this discussion could be applied to art in general, but my primary interest is in postcolonial literature as it has come to be known in the metropolitan world. Even so, the use of the term "art" may seem somewhat misleading since the category of "postcolonial art" has yet to be discursively created. My references in using the term, therefore, are exclusively to postcolonial literature, and to certain works of postcolonial literature.

19. See, for instance, Zuidervaart's discussion of the relation between the import and impact of art in Adorno's thought.

20. See Jameson *(Late Marxism),* Jay ("Anamnestic Totalization"), and Shroyer, for discussions on the role of memory in Marcuse's thought.

21. Although Marcuse's debt to Benjamin and other thinkers associated with the Frankfurt School is undeniable, as Martin Jay has pointed out, "the sources of his persistent fascination with

memory" stem from four separate stimuli: "his early philosophical training, his adherence to critical Marxism, his special concern for aesthetics, and his radical appropriation of psychology. Although often conflated in his discussions of anamnesia, these different sources contributed distinctive elements to his arguments, elements which can be isolated and critically analyzed" ("Anamnestic Totalization" 1).

4. The Economy of Postcolonial Literature

1. Godzich defines these as "literatures that cannot be readily comprehended within the hegemonic view of literature that has been dominant" (274).

2. The educational institution that produces pedagogical apparata is far from being a value-free neutral space. For discussions on this topic, see hooks and Wiegman.

3. In speculating on the unprecedented success of two first novels by Canadian ethnic authors, Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* and Nino Ricci's *Lives of Saints,* Smaro Kamboureli elaborates on this problem. She suggests that the novels in question "exemplify the expectations multiculturalism has generated from ethnic writing" by "importing otherness into Canadian literature as otherness," and thus thematizing "not the foreignness of ethnics in Canada but the concept of the foreign itself imaged as Canada" (55). Respectably distanced from their immediate location, both authors in these novels "write about their origins without contaminating them with any elements of Canadianness" (55). The implications are clear: the minority text can thus be used to deflect attention away from the immediacy of the presence of the "other" within by rewarding it for keeping its distance. While I am loath to ascribe such loaded intentionality to the authors, I would suggest that they are likely to be read without an adequate understanding of the context of their production or an understanding of the disguisement of their status as resident Canadians and their novels as part of Canadian literature as they are used to fulfill the inside/outside contract that gives such literature its currency.

4. Unless otherwise indicated, all references in this chapter are to *Aesthetic Theory*.

5. Adorno accords the status of art only to that art that "resembles itself" (*Notes to Literature,* I, 171). The saturation of the artwork with its immanent form defines art for Adorno.

6. On the decline of new criticism, see Stanley Aronowitz, especially 45 and 153.

7. Sturla Gunnarson's adaptation of the novel for the screen consciously moves away from this sort of representational politics. Gunnarson claims that his is "not a film about a Parsi or an Indian. It's about a man trying to lead an honest life in a corrupt world, having to deal with the betrayal of his best friend, a son who is rebelling, and the death of his surrogate son. Things become universal by being particular" (quoted in Verma).

8. Chantal Zabus describes the use of English by African writers in terms of a radical "relexification" or a "third code."

9. For commentary on Bakhtin and hybridity, see Young's elaborate discussions in *Colonial Desire.*

5. Before and after Midnight

1. Although his turn to the East as subject profited him, "When Rushdie wrote *Midnight's Children,* India was not yet a subject in vogue or important in the West" (Goonetilleke 20).

2. David Spurr outlines the perception of the native body under Western eyes thus: "The material value of the body as labor supply, its aesthetic value as object of artistic representation, its ethical value as a mark of innocence or degradation, its scientific value as evidence of racial difference or inferiority, its humanitarian value as the sign of suffering, its erotic value as the object of desire" (22).

3. James Gardner's review of *The Ground beneath Her Feet,* for instance, concedes that "there is no reason Rushdie should not write about the West, since he has lived here most of his life and since he is writing for Western consumption," but warns that "in thus shifting his attention to the West he enters a crowded field" and, to all appearances, "he has little to contribute that could compare in originality or beauty to his writings about the East" (61–62).

4. In his description of "cosmopolitans," that is, "those writers

Western reviewers seemed to be choosing as the interpreters and authentic public voices of the Third World—writers who, in a sense, allowed a flirtation with change that ensured continuity, a familiar strangeness," Tim Brennan initially includes the following: Mario Vargas Llosa, Derek Walcott, Salman Rushdie, Isabel Allende, Gabriel García Márquez, Bharati Mukherjee, a few others. He goes on to state that "if there was any one of them who seemed to capture what they collectively represented, it was Rushdie" (*Salman Rushdie* viii).

5. Rushdie explains the economy of violence thusly: "Between shame and shamelessness lies the axis upon which we turn; meteorological conditions at both these poles are of the most extreme, ferocious type. Shamelessness, shame: the roots of violence" (*Shame* 124).

6. Catherine Cundy observes that "Indira Gandhi's libel suit against Rushdie and the first edition of *Midnight's Children* centered on the suggestion that she had hastened her husband Feroze's early death from a heart attack. She won the case and the offending comments were removed from subsequent editions" (37–38).

7. Rushdie observes that "In the case of *MC* I certainly felt that if its subcontinental readers had rejected the work, I should have thought it a failure, no matter what the reaction in the West" (*Imaginary Homelands* 20).

8. Suspicious of the traditional rationalist approaches, Benjamin was to find the technique of montage, drawn from the work of the artistic avant-garde, particularly conducive to the development of a theory of knowledge based on the reorganization of constellations of material within a theoretical and stylistic framework that sought to avoid conceptual domination. Wolin explains that this strategy allowed Benjamin to "overcome the pitfalls of the traditional discursive, correspondence theory of truth—*adequatio intellectus et rei*" ("Critical Theory and Aestheticism" 194).

9. The organizational structure of the movement includes a religiocultural wing comprised of the VHP and RSS, and its electoral arm, the BJP, a conglomerate Rushdie refers to as an alphabet soup in the novel. The VHP is the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) with its youth wing, the Bajrang Dal; the

RSS is Rashtriya Swayamsevak Dal (National Volunteer Corps), and the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) is the electoral party intended to give political design and state sanction to the goals of the former. Fielding, like the fundamentalists he is supposed to portray, is against immigrants and in favor of the Hindu stability of caste, "against working women, in favor of sati, against poverty and in favor of wealth" (298). A cornerstone of the movement is the use of the mythical God-King Ram, whose alleged birthplace, Ayodhya, has become the center of contention and dispute.

10. In his review of the novel, J. M. Coetzee notes that Rushdie also represents the histories of the Moors in Spain and the Jews in Cochin without distortion or embellishment, unwilling to destabilize their status as significant fragments from the past that must be viewed without undue ambivalence about their validity.

11. See Berman's discussion of "the dialectic of nakedness" in Marx's philosophy.

12. In the Marcusian scheme, "Aesthetic opposition and love are the most radical oppositional forces since they produce an alternative reality completely at odds with an oppressive social reality" (Kellner, quoted in "Herbert Marcuse at 100" 11).

13. In *Shame* the narrator expresses the sentiment of "the naked unity of flesh" in terms of the fundamental laws of physics: "We are energy; we are fire; we are light. Finding the key, stepping through into the truth, a boy began to burn" (126).

14. See Banville for Rushdie's discussion of this period in Moorish Spain. In this interview, Rushdie also clarifies his understanding of the foundations of this society in Islamic imperialism.

15. The twin explosions at the Delhi Red Fort in June 2000 tell of this promise being broken again.

16. This would seem to also constitute a preemptive response to accusations, such as Afzal-Khan's, of his "failure to construct a viable alternative ideology for himself or for postcolonial society in general" (142).

6. Geography Is Not History

1. Benjamin's writings on experience, particularly as reflected

in modernist art and literature, are central to a philosophical investigation of modernity because of his attempt to theorize the relationship between experience and technology.

2. As Wolin points out, "By 'commodification' Adorno means the organized process whereby the arts are alienated from their primary and traditional status as a *use-value,* an object of aesthetic experience, and become an *exchange-value,* an object whose character is determined first and foremost by its relation to the market" (195). While this understanding of commodification is intended to explain the process by which art becomes increasingly determined by the market in terms of its content and shape, it is also important to bear in mind that our awareness of this phenomenon can also extend to a critical method that preempts the quest for those elements of postcolonial literature that struggle to retain a measure of aesthetic integrity even as they betray a capitulation to the tastes and desires of the market.

3. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Roy are from *The God of Small Things*.

4. Martin Jay points out that Adorno "shared his friend's hostility to *Erlebnis,* a term which had been extolled by the irrationalist 'philosophers of life' in Germany because of its alleged spontaneity and freedom from overt intellectual reflection" (*Adorno* 74–75).

5. As Jay explains it, "Adorno followed Benjamin in stressing the redemptive power of *Gedächtnis,* the reverential recollection of an object always prior to the remembering subject" (Jay, *Adorno* 68).

6. In his introductory essay on Benjamin, Donougho suggests that Benjamin "claimed, in effect, that art is at an end" (53). Adorno is far more willing to concede to art, truly "autonomous art," the capacity for retaining its significance and independence. It is nevertheless possible, however, to revise the general perception of Benjamin's fatalistic pronouncements for art in light of Wolin's nuanced reading of the progression and occasional contradictions of Benjamin's ideas, as well as Lunn's assessment of Benjamin's ambivalent response to the decline of the aura.

7. See Lunn on Benjamin's views on the decline of the aura, especially 251–56.

8. As Wolin suggests, “In truth, communal social organization was never so idyllic as modern romantics tend to imagine it. These were societies beset with problems of privation and scarcity, at the mercy of nature, where social rank was decided by birth, and in which formal legal channels to address injustice and grievances were highly underdeveloped. The gains made by advanced industrial societies in all these areas are by no means inconsequential” (226).

9. The novel’s insistence that a redemptive politics cannot afford to let individual loss and individual suffering languish unmourned nevertheless appeals to that which is collectively shared as a principle, but also fundamental in the forging of a collective subject of emancipation. Adorno explains that “the *prinicipium individuationis,* however, which implies the need for the aesthetically particular, is not only universal as a principle in its own right, it is inherent to the self-liberating subject. Its universal —spirit—is in terms of its own meaning not lodged beyond the particular individuals” (*Aesthetic Theory* 200).

10. The scene, the geographically manifest, is rendered historical when it seems to bear “the mark of a past event,” a “moment of becoming at a standstill” (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 71). In its design of retaining the synchronic and diachronic aspects of setting, the novel incorporates this historical sense while suggesting its ever-presence beyond the “mark of a past event.”

11. The novel’s insistence on the great stories as already “known” is worked into the narrative through a direct editorial on the nature of great stories. Schematically, however, the novel conveys this sense of knowing by making seemingly stray references to other, older stories. Among them is a reference to Sir Walter Scott’s poem “Lochinvar,” another tale of a dangerous river crossing for a meeting between lovers, which serves as one of the palimpsest versions of the great stories.

12. For Benjamin, too, mimesis operates in an errant mode, rendering aesthetic representation a matter of irreducible alterity.

13. Compare Marx’s views on history and human agency: “History does *nothing,* it ‘possesses *no* immense wealth,’ it ‘wages no battles.’ It is *man,* real living man, that does all that, that possesses and fights; ‘history’ is not a person apart, using man as means for its own particular aims; history is *nothing but* the

activity of man pursuing his aims" (*The Holy Family* 125).

14. The narrator alerts us earlier in the novel to Comrade Pillai's anxiety about the untouchable Velutha as a "snag" in his plans: "Of all the workers at Paradise Pickles, he was the only card-holding member of the Party, and that gave Comrade Pillai an ally he would rather have done without. He knew that all the other Touchable workers in the factory resented Velutha for ancient reasons of their own. Comrade Pillai stepped carefully around this wrinkle, waiting for a suitable opportunity to iron it out" (115).

15. Comrade Pillai's willingness to compromise the basic tenet of the *Communist Manifesto* that required "the clearest possible recognition of the hostile antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat," through his own entrepreneurial ambitions, is one more instance of a revolutionary movement contaminated by self-interest and the irrepressible desire for ascendancy (Marx and Engels, "Manifesto" 500).

16. Kellner explains that for Marcuse "aesthetic opposition and love are the most radical oppositional forces since they produce an alternative reality completely at odds with an oppressive social reality" (Kellner, quoted in "Herbert Marcuse at 100" 11).

17. For another response to Ahmad's critique of individual desire, see Brinda Bose.

18. Although one reads such phrases as "Locusts Stand I," as one of many instances of Roy's ability to capture the peculiarities and cadence of children's negotiations with language, this is also one of several instances where it might be read not merely as reflective, but suggestive. The association of a legal phrase indicating "no right to appear in court" with a biblical reference to one of many plagues visited upon an erring humanity prompts a more general meditation on the mechanisms of alienation and suffering unleashed by the human quest for domination.

19. The principles of artistic creation render the "data" of reality and event other to themselves. Within this reordering lies the intelligence of the text as internal to its form: "Under the law of the aesthetic form, the given reality is necessarily *sublimated:* the immediate content is stylized, the 'data' are reshaped and reordered in accordance with the demands of the art form, which

requires that even the representation of death and destruction invoke the need for hope—a need rooted in the new consciousness embodied in the work of art" (Marcuse, *Aesthetic Dimension* 7).

20. Marcuse acknowledges the interplay of constructive and destructive forces in human nature, but argues that it is possible to conceive of a communal cooperative founded on the life force, indeed imperative that the move toward solidarity proceed from a profound realization of its power: "Solidarity and community have their basis in the subordination of destructive and aggressive energy to the social emancipation of the life instincts" (*Aesthetic Dimension* 18).

21. The extent to which art arises from psychological forces in human nature is contested by Adorno in *Aesthetic Theory*. Yet it is in the realm of longing for a better world that he concedes a role for psychoanalytic sources for artistic expression. For Adorno, "if art has psychoanalytic roots, then they are the roots of fantasy in the fantasy of omnipotence. This fantasy includes the wish to bring about a better world" (9).

22. Models of cognition usually operate within the code of identity or adequation of concept to thing, defining "identity as the correspondence of the thing-initself to its concept" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 149). The nonidentity principle elaborated by various thinkers of the Frankfurt School exposes the futility of grasping the nonconceptual through conceptual means, emphasizing instead the excess that lies beyond this grasp. Representation puts in question that which is represented, rather than resolving its contradictions.

23. In theoretical terms, Adorno's meditations on idealism and totality in *Negative Dialectics* reject the false conceptual dogma of identitarianism. The pseudoreconciliation of fragmentary reality by conceptual totality denies the complexity of distinct identity. Adorno concludes that "since the basic character of every general concept dissolves in the face of distinct identity, a total philosophy is no longer to be hoped for" (136). In its aesthetic rendition of the problem of basic identity in confrontation with classificatory idealism, *The God of Small Things* repeatedly challenges the valence of conceptual categories. Cryptically coded as "the jam-jelly question," the problem of classification, "as per . . . [the] books," becomes a fundamental problem for the novel: "They all

tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much. The laws that make grandmothers grandmothers, uncles uncles, mothers mothers, cousins cousins, jam jam, and jelly jelly" (31). At numerous other points in the novel, the jam-jelly question is thrown up in a consideration of roles and choices. Comrade Pillai, for instance, justifies his collaboration with the "capitalist" Chacko by consoling himself that "Chacko-the-client and Chacko-the-Management were two different people. Quite separate of course from Chacko-the Comrade" (115). The novel offers almost textbook illustrations of Adorno's admonition, "Every single object subsumed under a class has definitions not contained in the definitions of that class" (*Negative Dialectics* 150). In somewhat different, but clearer terms, Adorno quotes Valéry in saying that "small unexplained facts always contain grounds for upsetting all explanations of 'big' facts" (*Notes to Literature,* I, 153).

24. In "On the Mimetic Faculty," Benjamin lauds the associative and analogical logic of young children, who are better able to "produce evanescent similarities" that provoke reflection. See Lunn 175–76.

25. Lunn argues that Benjamin's notion of "hope in the past" was enriched by Proust's "evocation of an elegiac happiness which is both restorative and 'unheard-of, the unprecedented" (247).

26. The classical art of memory includes in its arsenal the ability to recall topics, a term itself derived from the Latin for place, *topos.*

27. See chapter 19, book II, for Aristotle's exposition of koinoi topoi. Within the logic of argumentation, itself based upon common topics, "the possibility of anything, in respect of being or coming to be, implies the possibility of the contrary" (*The Rhetoric of Aristotle* 179).

28. See Roy's "The Greater Common Good" in *The Cost of Living.*

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